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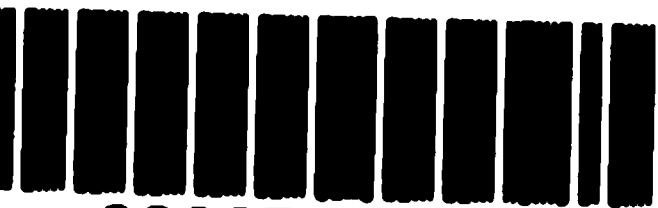
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ALFRED

OF



WESSEX.

VOLUME THE FIRST.

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MDCCCLII.

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To
WALTER ANDERSON PEACOCK Esquire, *Deputy*,
Chairman ;
THOMAS CORNEY Esquire, *Deputy*,
THOMAS PEWTRESS Esquire, *Deputy*,
and ROBERT BUTLER WHITESIDE, Esquire,
Members of the Commission of Sewers
of The City of London,
and the Liberties thereof :

GENTLEMEN,

I most respectfully take leave to dedicate this work to you, in testimony of my grateful acknowledgment of your essential kindness to me, at a time when kindness was most peculiarly valuable.

The prominent part which you were pleased to take in the, all but unanimous, expression of

good feeling on the part of my old masters, when I felt myself driven to quit their service; and the manifest inconvenience which would attend upon the introduction of some ninety other names, justify me in selecting you, as representing that body of Gentlemen, to whom I must ever feel deeply indebted for the substantial shape in which they were pleased to put their recognition of my attempt to serve them, in those offices which I successively held, throughout a period of thirty-two years.

The ensuing quietude which I have enjoyed, makes me look back to the distressing period with subdued thankfulness; and I cannot be too grateful to that merciful Providence, which has given to me such delightful employment, as smooths down the asperities naturally attendant upon declining age.

This work is the fruit of that employment; and, however unable I have been to realize my conception of the impress which such a composition should bear, I trust that, while accepting it as a testimonial, you will make such allowance for my failure, as the circumstances of my position and former occupation may fairly entitle me to.

You know how continuously laborious my duties were, you know how unremittingly they were attended to, and may naturally enquire how one, who, day after day, was patiently plodding on, and bearing and forbearing as best he could, should, in his old age, have broken out into such a strange freak.

I know not by what seeming casualty the first thought was elicited, as in a moment, but, from that moment, it positively haunted me. I did not seek, it came to me: I could not get rid of it: it clung to me: and had it been possible to have realized my first conception, and fixed it hot from the brain, perhaps more than my immediate acquaintances might have been interested by it.

Years, passed in hopeless drudgery, had tamed down the enthusiasm of boyhood, steadied the ardour of youth, and sobered the confidence of mature age. I had little left but perseverance, and a general impression of almost obliterated reading. Labour had no terrors for me; I had always worked hard and loved work. I purchased such books as were acquirable, rubbed up the shabby remains of my school-boy knowledge, and read away. That reading was in an

impartial spirit: I had no theoretical notions, or local prejudices, and am quite prepared to justify the conclusions at which I have arrived.

Attendance upon the sick-bed, and the discharge of duties consequent upon the death, of an esteemed and valued friend; the necessity for acquiring some knowledge of the mysteries of book-keeping, and making myself master of lengthy legal documents, nearly effaced all my previous impressions: the notes which I had jotted down were cast aside, my mind became occupied by more material thoughts, although I never quite forgot my theme; when, a very serious injury confined me to my couch, but still, providentially, left me ability to limp from room to room. This threw me on my own resources; I was most mercifully preserved in health; I was enabled to resume my task, and did so manfully. This narrative is the result.

It has so perfectly solaced me, as to have rendered that, which might have been a period of annoying petulance, and made me a pest to all around, the most delightful year which I have ever passed. Every one has been kind to me; at times I have forgotten all the world; I have not even heard the roaring rattle of a commercial

street, and have been alive only to my work. The joy of being helped over difficulties and discouragements, made every day's advance sweeter, and I could almost have regretted when the last line of composition was written, had not my mind been cheered, by the prospect of several months employment, in the labours of correction and transcription.

The world has been, impudently and well nigh mendaciously, told, in all the imposing pomp of medico-statistical Blue-Book authority, that the air of London is so filthily polluted, as to be fraught only with disease and death; and that it's waters are full of all sorts of demon-like vermin, and little short of foully poisonous; until that one is almost induced to sit down in despair, and believe the shameless exaggeration: but,—I have been wholly confined to my residence, as it were in the very heart of a densely-peopled place, during twelve months (less one fortnight:) during more than another twelve months I have only ridden out occasionally: I have breathed nothing but this contaminated air, I have drank only this disgusting water, yet am I not only unpoisoned and unsuffocated, but I have not suffered one day's illness, arising from the protracted con-

finement, and, although weakened, I am still in as perfect health, as when I habitually walked ten or twelve miles a day. In truth, I have been most indecorously well, contrary to law and common sense; and the only explanation I can hit upon is, that London air and London water have been most villainously maligned, for a purpose, or, that constant and pleasurable employment has, under God's good providence, compensated the want of active exercise, and converted deadly venom into nutritious honey.

Such, Gentlemen, have been the origin, progress, and sanatory consequences, of this my labour of love, this child of my delight. It is for you to say whether or not it is worthy of affection.

I am aware that an author is recommended to retain his work seven years, before that he ventures into print; but, I cannot expect to live seven years longer, and if I should, the probable result would be, that half of my composition would, deservedly, be blotted out, and the remainder be pitched into the fire, you would be deprived of the fun of laughing at me, and I should have foregone the gratification of testifying my sense of the benefits which you have

conferred upon me: therefore have I ventured into print.

I have the pleasure of subscribing myself

GENTLEMEN,

Your much obliged Servant

RICHARD KELSEY

73 Chiswell Street, London.

customarily called Blank-verse, should be constructed. He does not think that any given number of syllables is the true test, but that the qualities of measured, or harmonized prose, depend upon the quantity of modulated sound, in any given line; and, that the usually assigned number of ten syllables for an heroic line, may not only advantageously and agreeably be exceeded, but that a line of, it may be even fourteen, or fifteen syllables, as articulately spelt, may, in quantity of sound, as elliptically pronounced, not be longer than, nay not so long as, one in which only ten syllables can be enumerated. He may be wrong, his ear may be inaccurate, but, acting upon this view, he thinks that, in this work of more than thirty thousand lines, he has put the principle to a sufficient test, and must patiently endure any amount of censure which he may, deservedly, have incurred.

Upon such a subject, he has not a literary acquaintance of whom he could ask counsel, and, reference to books rather satisfies him that the productions of highly-esteemed authors might, in some cases, have been improved both in sense and melody, by a less rigid attention to the dry constructive rule.

The opening lines of the composition will clearly show the wild extent of his aspiration. Much as he may feel that the execution has fallen woefully short of his wish, he has not suppressed them, because he conceives that their existence may be a useful warning to young persons, and teach them, by example, how dangerous it is to indulge in ardent fancies.

Throughout nearly a thousand years, no one has arisen to do justice to the subject which he has selected ; perhaps it is impossible adequately to discourse of one who so well deserved the epithet, Great, but it will even be something consolatory, should it be said that he has failed in a worthy cause.

In preparing himself for the attempt he has sought the best information within his reach, and, having entered upon the enquiry wholly unbiassed by any previously conceived opinion, the opinions which he has arrived at, have been formed after careful and impartial consideration.

It is indeed quite immaterial whether the claims of Eddington with Bratton, or Heddington with Oldbury, be preferable : it is enough that there cannot be a doubt Wessex was delivered,

by a battle bravely fought in Wiltshire, by the men of Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and Hampshire: an honour of which they may justly be proud, although he cannot but think that, when Alfred called them only to his aid, as the actual combatants, he assigned to the other, and sea-board portions of his kingdom, the task of guarding the coast against the roving freebooters, who were ready to swell the ranks of his opponents; and he has therefore felt it right to allow other warriors a limited share in the contest. That of Devonshire is indisputable.

The situation of Egbryhtastan was upon the Eastern edge of Sealwood, that is certain, but whether Egbryhtastan was or was not upon the site of Brixton-Deverill, is an affair of very little consequence. Taking it that antiquaries have correctly decided that to have been it's place, he conceives the claim made in favour of Eddington to be utterly untenable; inasmuch as, that Alfred, starting thence, must have marched nearly two miles beyond Bratton-Camp to attack the Danes at Eddington, and must also have been driven back nearly the same two miles before the, so far victorious Danes, as such a circumstance would shew them to have been, could have found a ready

ascent to the Camp upon Bratton-Down, for, he takes it to have been impracticable, to ascend, in anything like a fighting attitude, directly from the hollow ground at Eddington to the summit of Eddington Hill; whereas, with respect to the claim in behalf of Heddington, first the day's march from Egbryhtastan to Æcglea, and the morning's march from Æcglea to Ethandum, better comport with the text; while the distance of some four miles from Heddington to Oldbury, along which the writer assumes the Danes to have been driven, would be but a continuation of the onward march of the Saxons. Indeed, if confirmation of this view be needed, it is supplied by Ethelwerd, who, in his Chronicle, uses the express words, "King Alfred fought against the army that was in Chippenham, at a place called Ethandune," and Heddington is barely seven miles from Chippenham, while Eddington is thirteen miles distant from that town.

He therefore has laid the scene of the great exploit, in the flat land, at the feet of Spye-Park and Bowood-Park, extending from Highfield, near Sandy Lanes, (the site of Roman Verlucio) to Heddington; and, he assumes that the Danes had not relinquished Chippenham, as their head

quarters, but had merely passed over the hill into the valley, as a field for relaxation, and relief from the horrors of "the sooty roof-tree."

He thinks that, during the winter and early spring months, they might have made the predacious excursions, in which Amesbury was destroyed (by Guthrun,) and Malmsbury and Steeple-Ashton burnt by them, and, as traditions also exist of hard fighting at Slaughterford, upon the Box, and at Christian-Malford, upon the Avon, he has deemed himself not unjustifiable in pressing these into his service, and making them subserve his object of delineating the ferocious horrors of war, and the beautiful character of a religious and patriotic king: and, as it is scarcely probable that, during fourteen days of blockade with all its attendant tormenting privation, the Pagans did not endeavour to effect an escape, or that their countrymen, who were in possession of all Anglia, did not attempt to relieve them; he has introduced such incidents as he considered needful to fill up the interval, and has availed himself of William of Malmesbury's statement, that Hastings "went over sea with such of the Danes as had refused to become Christians," to make use of that daring commander in the attempt to rescue his brethren-in-arms.

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In the absence of all definite information, various conjectures have been hazarded as to the nature of the festivity in which the Danes were indulging; some holding it to have been a sacrifice, and others describing it as unrestrained feasting. Both are probable, and he has therefore felt himself quite free to make his own version, and to assign such a cause as is not inconsistent with the habits of such freebooters: for, the sacrifice to Odin for success in their expeditions, was celebrated, customarily, in the beginning of spring: and, were it not so, he thinks it quite fair to suppose that, at the opening of a fresh campaign, an especial sacrifice would be resorted to.

The election of a War-King, King-of-Kings, or Commander in chief, does not appear an unlikely occurrence, as consequent upon the death of Hubba, the last of their original leaders. The Heirship-feast would follow, as a matter-of-course, with its attendant ceremonial of boastful declaration as to what enterprises the new king intended to undertake.

That this was a common practice is shewn by the account of the villainous Ingiald Illrada's Heirship-feast, which was held "in a large Hall

made ready for the occasion, one, not less nor less sumptuous than that at Upsal, and this hall was called the Seven-King's-Hall, and in it were seven high seats for Kings."

The account of the two feasting-halls erected by Aake the bonder, for the entertainment of the Kings Harald Haarfager and Eric Eymundsson, and the readiness and rapidity with which such structures were erected and richly furnished, he thinks amply justify his assumption that a Heir-ship-feast would have taken place in such a description of building, and not in a canvas, a wadmál, or a tarpauling tent. Indeed William of Malmesbury mentions Alfred's "being admitted, as a professor of the Mimic-art, to the banquetting room," while the description, in the Heimskringla, of Aake's feast, which ended in his dastardly murder by Eric Eymundsson, reads thus: "Aake had a great feasting-hall, but it was old; and he made a new hall, not less than the old one, and had it ornamented in the most splendid way. 'The new hall he had hung with new hangings, but the old had only its old ornaments. Now when the Kings came to the feast, King Eric with his court were taken into the old hall; but Harald with his followers into the

new. The same difference was in all the table furniture, and King Eric had the old-fashioned vessels and horns, but all gilded and splendid; while King Harald and his men had entirely new vessels and horns adorned with gold, all with carved figures, and shining like glass: and both companies had the best liquor."

These halls had doors at both ends. "King Olaf built a King's-house in Nidaros, and in it was a large room for his Court, with doors at both ends;" they also had moveable boards, or luffers, in the windows, so as to regulate the admission of light, and to shut out stormy weather. A similar hall is described in Orkney. "There was a great room in which there were doors at each end;" Nor can such large structures be wondered at when we read, that Olaf built a ship, the length of whose keel was seventy four ells, (i e as long as a forty-gun-frigate) a work requiring far greater skill than any house-carpentry whatever.

Considering the high estimation in which the Northmen held music and song, accomplishments of which their bravest kings and warriors were justly proud; and seeing that seats of honour, directly before the king, were expressly reserved

for them, as thus instanced: "the scalds were often in the king's house, for they were well spoken men, and often in the day time they sat in front of the king's high seat; and Hialto, to whom they paid the highest respect in all things, by their side": and also, that the harp was a ready key to every hall-door, he has not conceived it necessary to disguise Alfred as a common, wandering harper, or glee-man; a disguise, which, to have been effectual, would have involved the necessity of shaving off his beard, and assuming a sort of ecclesiastical dress, as did the Saxon glee-men; but he has decked him in such wise, as was not unusual with the rude and cruel, yet high-minded warriors, whose society he sought. He conceives that such dress and manners, as indicating a due sense of the dignity of his art, would, in truth, have been really less liable to suspicion and more likely to facilitate his object than the adoption of any lowly garb. William of Malmesbury says, that "he had for a companion, one of his most faithful adherents," as was not unusual with a lordly minstrel; the writer has therefore given him Alric, as a glee-man, to amuse the soldiery with dancing and sleight of hand.

He has excluded women from the feasting-

hall, pleading this extract from the *Heimskringla* in justification ; “ King Granmar told his daughter Hildigunna, who was a remarkably beautiful girl, to make ready and carry ale to the vi-kings. Thereupon she took a silver goblet, filled it, bowed before King Hiorvard, and said “ Success to all Ylfingers : this cup to the memory of Rolf Krake,” drank out the half, and handed the cup to King Hiorvard. He took the cup, and took her hand, and said she must sit beside him. She says, that is not vi-king fashion to drink two-and-two with women. Hiorvard replies, that it were better for him to make a change, and leave the vi-king law, and drink in company with her.” And if this be not sufficient, he must refer to the account of Ingiald’s Heirship-feast, at which women do not appear to have been present.

Alfred’s introduction of himself by quotations from the *Havamaal*, or Sublime discourse of Odin, and the contest in ænigmas, with the use of music and song, are consistent with the time, and the festive character of the entertainment. As a composition, he fears that this portion of his work will not be deemed successful. He is quite conscious of the imperfectness of his paraphrases, and fancies that he might perchance have been

more successful, had he adopted the less constrained length of line which occurs in some Saxon compositions ; but, with decaying faculties, he could not attempt to re-write, them, probably with no better success.

It was not unusual in those days, as in the palmier times of chivalry, for damsels not only to require their lovers to attest affection by deeds of daring, but even personally to engage in such adventures: the writer has therefore sparingly availed himself of such heroines.

The costume and weapons of the time he hopes will be found correct, but, as there may be some doubt as to the mention of stirrups, he thinks it will be well to quote this passage from the Saga of Harald Haarfager, a contemporary of Alfred. “In this war fell Ivar, a son of Rognvald, Earl of Möre ; and King Harald gave Rognvald, as a compensation for the loss, the Orkney and Shetland isles, when he sailed from the West ; but Rognvald immediately gave both these countries to his brother Sigurd, who remained behind them, and King Harald, before sailing Eastward, gave Sigurd the earldom of them. Thorstein the Red, a son of Olaf the white, and Aude the Wealthy, entered into partnership with him ; and, after plundering in Scotland, they subdued Caith-

ness and Sutherland, as far as Ekjalsbakki. Earl Sigurd killed Melbrigda-Tonn, a Scotch earl, and hung his head to his stirrup-leather, but the calf of his leg was scratched by the teeth, which were sticking out from the head, and the wound caused inflammation in his leg, of which the earl died, and he was laid in a mound at Ekjalsbakki."

Supernatural agency was firmly believed in, by both Christians and Pagans. In availing himself of it, the writer hopes the distinct natures of good and evil agency have been duly maintained. The use of it he thinks may add to the interest of the tale ; it is in keeping with compositions of like character, and he conceives it to be perfectly justifiable in a work of fiction, especially as the kind of agency is quite consistent with a superstition of that state of society, in which the Christians were even more eager than the Pagans to swallow the most unblushing lies ; and for the which faith or credulity, unfortunately for the credit of a holy creed, Christians were as cruelly murderous as Pagans, if not more so, as the following extracts from the Heimskringla will shew : "Then the King (Olaf Tryggvesson) proceeded to Viken, and held a Thing, at which he declared, in a speech, that all the men, of whom

it should be known to a certainty, that they dealt with evil spirits, or in witchcraft, or were sorcerers, should be banished forth of the land. Thereafter the King had all the neighbourhood ransacked after such people, and called them all before him; and, when they were brought to the Thing, there was a man among them called Eyvind Kellda, a grandson of Rognvald Rettilbein, Harald Haarfager's son. Eyvind was a sorcerer, and particularly knowing in witchcraft. The King let all these men be seated in one room, which was well adorned, and made a great feast for them, and gave them strong drink in plenty. Now, when they were all very drunk, he ordered the house to be set on fire, and it, and all the people within it, were consumed, all but Eyvind Kellda, who contrived to escape by the smokehole in the roof. And when he had got a long way off, he met some people on the road going to the king; and he told them to tell the king that Eyvind Kellda had slipped away from the fire, and would never come again in King Olaf's power, but would carry on his arts of witchcraft as much as ever. When the people came to the king with such a message from Eyvind, the king was ill pleased that Eyvind had escaped death.

When spring came, King Olaf went out to

Viken, and was on visits to his great farms. He sent notice over all Viken, that he would call out an army in summer, and proceed to the north parts of the country. Then he went North to Agder; and when Easter was approaching, he took the road to Rogaland, with three hundred men, and came of Easter evening north to Augvaldness, in Kormt Island, where an Easter feast was prepared for him. That same night came Eyvind Kellda to the island with a well-manned long-ship, of which the whole crew consisted of sorcerers and other dealers with evil spirits. Eyvind went from his ship to the land, with his followers, and there they played many of their pranks of witchcraft. Eyvind clothed them with caps of darkness, and so thick a mist, that the king and his men could see nothing of them; but when they came near to the house at Augvaldness it became clear day. Then it went differently from what Eyvind had intended; for now there came just such a darkness over him and his comrades in witchcraft as they had made before; so that they could see no more from their eyes, than from the back of their heads, but went round and round in a circle upon the island. When the king's watchmen saw them going

about, without knowing what people these were, they told the king. Thereupon he rose up with his people, put on his clothes, and when he saw Eyvind with his men wandering about, he ordered his men to arm and examine what folk these were. The king's men discovered it was Eyvind, took him and all his company prisoners, and brought them to the king. Eyvind now told all he had done on his journey. Then the king ordered them all to be taken out to a skerry, which was under water in flood tide, and there to be left bound. Eyvind and all with him left their lives on this rock ; and the skerry is still called the Skerry of Shriecks."

"When King Olaf Tryggvesson had been two years king of Norway, there was a Saxon priest in his house who was called Thangbrand, a passionate ungovernable man, and a great man-slayer, but he was a good scholar and a clever man. The king would not have him in his house, upon account of his misdeeds, but gave him the errand to go to Iceland, and bring that land to the Christian faith. The king gave him a merchant vessel, and as far as we know of this voyage of his, he landed first in Iceland, at Ostfiord, in the southern Alfta-fiord ; and passed the winter

in the house of Hall of Sidu. Thangbrand proclaimed Christianity in Iceland, and, on his persuasion, Hall and his house-people, and many other chiefs, allowed themselves to be baptized; but there were many more who spoke against it. Thorvald Veile, and Veterlid the scald, composed a satire about Thangbrand, but he killed them both outright. Thangbrand was two years in Iceland, and was the death of three men before he left it.”—

“King Olaf gave life and freedom to all the men who asked it, and agreed to become Christian. King Olaf sailed with his fleet northwards along the coast, and baptized all the people among whom he came, and when he came north to Salten-fiord, he intended to sail into it to look for Raud; but a dreadful tempest and storm was raging in the fiord. They lay there a whole week, in which the same weather was raging within the fiord, while without there was a fine brisk wind, only fair for proceeding north along the land. Then the king continued his voyage north to Omd, in Hind-island, where all the people submitted to Christianity. Then the king turned about and sailed to the south again; but when he came to the north side of Salten-fiord, the same tempest

was blowing, and the sea ran high out from the fiord, and the same kind of storm prevailed for several days while the king was lying there. Then the king applied to Bishop Sigurd, and asked him if he knew any counsel about it; and the bishop said he would try if God would give him power to conquer these arts of the Devil.

Bishop Sigurd took all his mass-robes, and went forward to the bow of the king's ship, ordered tapers to be lighted, and incense to be brought out. Then he set the crucifix upon the stem of the vessel, read the Evangelist and many prayers, besprinkled the whole ship with holy water, and then ordered the ship tent to be stowed away, and to row into the fiord. The king ordered all the other ships to follow him. Now when all was ready on board the Crane to row, she went into the fiord without the rowers finding any wind, and the sea was curled about their keel-track like as in a calm, so quiet and still was the water; yet on each side of them the waves were lashing up, so high that they hid the sight of the mountains. And so the one ship followed the other in the smooth sea-track, and they proceeded this way the whole day and night, until they reached Godö isle. Now when they came to

Raud's house, his great ship, the dragon, was afloat close to the land. King Olaf went up to the house immediately with his people, made an attack on the loft in which Raud was sleeping, and broke it open. The men rushed in, Raud was taken and bound, and of the people with him, some were killed and some made prisoners. Then the king's men went to a lodging in which Raud's house-servants slept, and killed some, bound others, and beat others. Then the king ordered Raud to be brought before him, and offered him baptism. "And," says the king, "I will not take thy property from thee, but rather be thy friend, if thou wilt make thyself worthy to be so." Raud exclaimed with all his might against the proposal, saying he would never believe in Christ, and making his scoff of God. Then the king was wroth, and said Raud should die the worst of deaths. And the king ordered him to be bound to a beam of wood, with his face uppermost, and a round pin of wood to be set between his teeth, to force his mouth open. Then the king ordered an adder to be stuck into the mouth of him, but the serpent would not go into his mouth, but shrunk back when Raud breathed against it. Now the king ordered a hollow branch of an angelica root, to be stuck into

Raud's mouth; others say the king put his horn into his mouth, and forced the serpent to go in, by holding a red-hot iron before the opening. So the serpent crept into the mouth of Raud, and down his throat, and gnawed it's way out of his side, and thus Raud perished. King Olaf took here much gold and silver, and other property of weapons, and many sorts of precious effects; and and all the men who were with Raud he either had baptized, or, if they refused, had them killed or tortured." "King Olaf baptized the whole people of the fiord, and then sailed southwards along the land; and on this voyage happened much, and various things which are set down in tales and sagas: namely how witches and evil spirits tormented his men and sometimes himself."—"Then Eyvind Kinnrif was brought up to a conference with the king, who asked him to allow himself to be baptized like other people; but Eyvind decidedly answered he would not. The king still, with persuasive words, urged him to accept Christianity, and both he and the bishop used many suitable arguments, but Eyvind would not allow himself to be moved. The king offered him gifts, and great fiefs, but Eyvind refused all. Then the king threatened him with tortures and death, but Eyvind was steadfast. Then the king

ordered a pan of glowing coals to be placed upon Eyvind's belly, which burst asunder. Eyvind cried, "Take away the pan and I will say something before I die," which also was done. The king said "Wilt thou now Eyvind believe in Christ"? "no," said Eyvind, "I can take no baptism, for I am an evil spirit put into a man's body, by Lapland sorcery, because in no other way could my father and mother have a child." With that died Eyvind who had been one of the greatest sorcerers."—

Nor were these the solitary acts of a semi-barbarian. Of Olaf Haraldsson, who was afterwards canonized, it is written: "If any there were who would not renounce heathen ways, he took the matter so zealously, that he drove some out of the country, mutilated others of hands or feet, or stung their eyes out, hung up some, cut down some with the sword, but let none go unpunished who would not serve God."—"Rærek was an able but obstinate man, whose fidelity he could not trust to, if he made peace with him; therefore he ordered both his eyes to be punched out, and took him in that condition about with him. He ordered Gudrod's tongue to be cut out, but Ring and two others, he banished from Norway, under oath never to return."—

Should his remarks upon the gross ignorance among the Christian priesthood be deemed too severe; he has to say, that not only is that ignorance historically notorious, but the ignorance and degeneracy of the class, and the laxity of religious establishments, stands recorded in the Epistle of the Venerable Bede to Bishop Egbert. “but the vulgar, that is those who know only their own language, must be made to say them (i e the Apostle’s Creed and the Lord’s Prayer) and repeat them over and over again in their own tongue. This must be done, not only in the case of laymen who are still in the life of the world, but with the clergy or monks, who are without a knowledge of the Latin tongue.”—“Wherefore also, I have myself often given English translations of both these, namely the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer to uneducated priests.”—“but, because it is noised abroad concerning some bishops, that they have no men of religion or continence near them, but rather such as indulge in laughter, and jests, revellings, and drunkenness, and other temptations of an idle life, and who rather feed their bodies with carnal food, than their minds on the heavenly sacrifice.”—“For, we have heard it reported, that there are many country houses and hamlets of our nation, situated on inaccessible

mountains and thick forests, where, for many years, no bishop comes to perform any of the duties of holy ministry or Divine grace, yet none of these is free from paying tribute to the bishop: and yet, not only is there no bishop among them to confirm, by the laying on of hands, those who have been baptized; but they have not even any teacher to instruct them in the truth of the faith, and in the difference between good and evil. Thus, some of our bishops, not only do not freely preach the Gospel, and confirm those who have been baptized, but do what is worse, for they receive money from their hearers contrary to God's commands, and neglect the ministry of the word which God ordained them to preach.—“For when a bishop, for the love of money, has, nominally, taken under his guardianship a larger portion of the people than he can by any means visit and preach to the whole year round, it is plain that he is only gathering danger and destruction for himself, as well as those whose false guardian he is.”—“there are, as we know well, many places calling themselves monasteries, but exhibiting no sign whatever of a monastic system, some of which I should much like to see transferred by synodical authority, that their present luxury, vanity, and intemperance in meat and

drink, might be exchanged for chastity, temperance, and piety.”—“ For, disgraceful though it be to say it, so many estates have been received, under the name of monasteries, by those who know nothing whatever of the monastic life, as you yourselves know better than I, that the sons of the nobles, or of discharged soldiers, can find no place wherein to receive their possessions, and thus, having nothing to do, and not marrying, though past the age of puberty, they are held by no tie of conscience, and therefore either go beyond sea and abandon their country, which they ought to fight for, or, with still greater wickedness and impudence, not being bound to chastity, become addicted to luxury and fornication, and do not abstain even from the very virgins who are dedicated to God.

But others, who are laymen and have no experience of the regular monastic life, nor any love for the same, commit a still greater scandal: for they give money to the kings, and, under pretence of erecting monasteries, they acquire possessions wherein the more freely to indulge their licentiousness; and, procuring these by a royal edict to be assigned over to them in inheritance, they get the deed, by which these privileges

are confirmed, as if it were a matter worthy of God's notice, authenticated by the signatures of the bishops, abbots, and secular authorities. And thus, having gained possession of farms and villages, they free themselves from every bond both human and Divine, and in the character of superiors over monks, though they are but laymen, they do nothing therein but gratify their desires."—"Well suited to them is the proverb that "wasps though they can make combs yet store them with poison instead of honey."—"Such blindness might, in truth, some time or other be put an end to, and restrained by regular discipline, and expelled by pontifical and synodical authority, beyond the limits of the Holy Church, if the pontiffs themselves were not found to aid and abet such crimes; for they not only do not take care to annul such unrighteous decrees by righteous ones, but rather do all in their power to confirm them, by their own subscriptions, as we have said before; prompted by the same love of money to confirm those wicked writings, as the purchasers themselves were to buy such monasteries."—"It is your duty, I say, to provide lest the Devil usurp the sovereignty in places dedicated to the Lord, lest discord take the place of peace, strife of piety, drunkenness of sobriety,

and fornication and murder, reign instead of charity and chastity.”—

The actors, in this narrative, have an abruptness and a freedom of speech, which ill accord with our conception of the appropriate manners and language of kings and chieftains. The writer professes not to depict heroes and demi-gods, but men, who, however some of them claimed descent from Gods, were not much less rude than the Gods themselves. And, in truth that abruptness and that freedom, are much less coarse than the people were among whom such circumstances as these could occur. “He and the queen sat in the high seat and drank together towards the evening, and all his men were entertained in the most hospitable manner. At night, when the king went to rest a bed was put up for him, with a hanging of fine linen around it, and with costly bed clothes; but in the lodging-house there were few men. When the king was undressed and had gone to bed, the queen came to him, filled a bowl herself for him to drink, and was very gay, and pressed him to drink. The king was drunk above measure, and indeed so they were both. Then he slept, and the queen away went, and laid herself down also.”—It is

subsequently related "The same evening came another king called Visavald, from Russia, likewise to pay his addresses to Queen Sigrid. Lodging was given to both the kings, and to all their people, in a great old room of an outbuilding, and all the furniture was of the same character ; but there was no want of drink in the evening, and that so strong that all were drunk, and the watch both inside and outside fell fast asleep." She then burnt them to death.

"King Olaf had Thorarin with him as a guest for some days, and conversed much with him, and Thorarin even slept in the king's lodgings. One morning early, the king awoke while the others were still sleeping. The sun had newly risen in the sky, and there was much light within. The king saw that Thorarin had stretched out one of his feet from under the bed clothes, and he looked at the foot awhile. In the meantime the others in the lodging awoke, and the king said to Thorarin, "I have been awake for awhile, and have seen a sight that was worth seeing, and that is a man's foot so ugly that I do not think an uglier can be found in this merchant-town." Thereupon he told the others to look at it, and see if it was not so ; and all agreed

with the king. When Thorarin observed what they were talking about, he said, "There are few things for which you cannot find a match, and that may be the case here." The king says, "I would rather say that such another ugly foot cannot be found in the town, and I would lay any wager upon it." Then said Thorarin, "I am willing to bet that I shall find an uglier foot still in the town." The king, "Then he who wins shall have the right to get any demand from the other he chooses to make." "Be it so," said Thorarin. Thereupon he stretches out his other foot from under the bed-clothes, and it was in no way handsomer than the other, and moreover wanted a little toe. "There," said Thorarin, "see now king, my other foot which is so much uglier, and besides has no little toe. Now I have won." The king replies, "That other foot was so much uglier than this one, by having five ugly toes upon it, and this has only four; and now I have won the choice of asking something from thee." "The sovereign's decision must be right." says Thorarin, "but what does the king require of me"?—It is said of Ingigerd, the daughter of the Swedish king," they went one day to her house where she sat at the drinking table with many men," yet this princess was

afterwards married to King Jarisleif of Russia.

But, if the manners were coarse, a redeeming simplicity accompanied them. "Olaf's mother Aasta, was sitting in the room, and around her some of her girls. When the servants told her of King Olaf's approach, and that he might soon be expected, Aasta stood up directly, and ordered the men and girls to put every thing in the best order. She ordered four girls to bring out all that belonged to the decoration of the room, and put it in order, with hangings and benches. Two fellows brought straw for the floor, two brought forward four-cornered tables and the drinking jugs, two bore out victuals and placed the meat on the table, two she sent away from the house to procure, in the greatest haste, all that was needed, and two carried in the ale; and all the other serving men and girls went outside of the house. Messengers went to seek King Sigurd, wherever he might be, and brought to him his dress-clothes, and his horse with gilt saddle, and his bridle, which was gilt and set with precious stones. Four men she sent off to the four quarters of the country, to invite all the great people to a feast, which she prepared as a rejoicing for her son's return. All, who were before in the

house, she made to dress themselves with the best they had, and lent clothes to those who had none suitable.

King Sigurd Syr was standing in his corn-field, when the messengers came to him, and brought him the news, and told him all that Aasta was doing at home in the house. He had many people on his farm. Some were then shearing corn, some bound it together, some drove it to the building, some unloaded it and put it in stack or barn, but the king and two men with him went sometimes into the field, sometimes to the place where the corn was put into the barn. His dress, it is told, was this: he had a blue kirtle, and blue hose, shoes which were laced about the legs, a grey cloak, and a grey wide-brimmed hat, a veil before his face, a staff in his hand, with a gilt-silver head on it, and a silver ring around it." The king sat down "and made them take off his shoes, and put tanned leather boots on, to which he bound his gold spurs. Then he put off his cloak and coat, and dressed himself in his finest clothes, with a scarlet cloak over all, girded on his sword, set a gilded helmet upon his head, and mounted his horse. He sent his labouring people out to the neighbourhood, and gathered to him

thirty well-clothed men, and rode home with them.”—

The introduction of the stories of Æneas, of Ulysses and Circe, (the Aulixes and Kirke of Alfred's version) and of Orpheus and Eurydice, may at first appear inconsistent. There is no doubt that Alfred knew them, and it is not improbable that, although disfigured by oral tradition, the general events of the Trojan war were extensively current, since that, even now, there are discoverable traces of them, in places where they could scarcely be expected to have penetrated. The Saxon ladies were celebrated for their works with the needle, and the plunder, and merchandise, acquired by the northern freebooters, was often of the costliest description, and may well be supposed to include ancient tapestries, depicting popular events; and the writer assumes that the tessellated pavement of the feasting-hall, was a decorative ornament of a Roman villa, or of a general's tent.

The profuse allusion to gold is by no means an exaggeration, since that metal is repeatedly mentioned in the Sagas. In actual use it might in many cases have been only gilding, but the

golden torques and armlets which are even now occasionally found, the bracelets, rings, and helmets, so repeatedly mentioned in their historic compositions, the quantity of golden vessels given by the Saxon Kings to the Pope and other Romish priests, shew that gold was much more plentiful then, than we can readily suppose ; and indeed it is quite possible that gold and other metals were anciently found upon the surface of Northern Europe, largely enough to justify the tradition of a Golden-Age, wherein the Gods had furniture and horse-trappings of that valuable article. We naturally rank such tales among the fabrications of the Age of Fairies, because we know no better, as, at the end of another thousand years, the stores of Siberia, California, and Australia, may be placed among the fables of antiquity.

The epithet 'giant' has been oft used. Although it did generally convey the idea of supernatural bulk, it is not always to be taken in that sense. In many cases it appears to have meant no more than wild, savage, ferocious. Jotunheim was a land of Giants, and, in the legend of Thor and Thialfe, enormous magnitude was the attribute of those mythological monsters ; but, in the historical account of the death of King

Egil, the old bull which gored him to death is called a demon beast, and a Jotun, yet really was an animal of the ordinary size, which, having been pampered preparatory to sacrifice, had broken loose and become wild, and destructively ferocious.

Allusion having been made to the age of Alfred when he began to read; lest the writer should be deemed erroneous, he has to remark that, on the contrary, he thinks an error has unwittingly crept into the received account, and that vii, as originally recorded by Asser, has carelessly been changed into xii. It is not in itself material, unless it should be deemed of consequence to the character of his tutor Swithin: but, if we consider that when Alfred was twelve years old, Juthitta, the widow of Ethelwulph, was the shameless and incestuous wife of her step-son; it does not appear very likely that she would have proffered a prize to her husband, or to her step-son and brother-in-law, Ethelbert, to induce them to acquire the art of reading. More probably the offer was made by the pious, well-educated, and nobly born Osburga, Alfred's own mother; who died in 855 A D, when Alfred was in his seventh year.

Repeated references have been made to the traditional adventures of those Mythological beings, the deified heroes of the North. The whole subject is necessarily extremely obscure. There seems to have been some slight similarity to, if not connection between them, and the, to us, more familiar deities of Grecian Mythology; but, it would appear somewhat more probable, that these resemblances are only accidental, and referable to some very early, and original, and possibly antediluvian form of idolatry, when (so early as after the birth of Enos, "then it was begun to call *idols* by the name of the Eternal." (*Benisch*) or, "then began men to be called by the name of the Lord." (*Conquest*) as the passage, Gen. 4 v 26, is held to be more correctly translated than in our authorised version) the names, attributes, and fabulous adventures of those impersonations of the divine attributes, or of the powers of nature, or of the heavenly host, became more and more varied, as the respective tribes and nations sank deeper and deeper in delusion, until, like their besotted worshippers, they only retained a certain general resemblance, by which they might be recognized as members of the same foul family.

It has been held, by Jewish writers, that the knowledge and the worship of the true God, and the precepts of the primitive moral and religious law, was generally diffused among ancient nations: that there was, as it were, an universal law of conscience, a common sense of right and wrong, originally and indelibly stamped upon the human mind. At times this became dreadfully distorted, but by it, as a whole, the Gentiles were and are governed, and to it they will be held amenable in the Great Day, when the virtuous and the pious, among all nations, will share in the blessings of the world to come: and although the Jews will be rewarded in a Heaven appropriate for them only, the Gentiles will not be shut out from a state of happiness; but it will be enjoyed in a heaven apart from that of the Jews. To maintain in vitality this law of conscience, seven precepts are said to have been given, which prohibit blasphemy, idolatry, murder, adultery, theft, uncleanness, and cruelty.

It is quite foreign to the writer's purpose to enter into Mythological enquiries, but although he has, in the text, repeatedly adverted to the adventures of the Scandinavian deities, these may have been forgotten by those who, like himself,

have retained little more of their school-boy learning, than is necessary for the battle of life among men of business : he therefore thinks it well, as concisely as may be, to sketch a general outline of their creed.

He is much inclined, to coincide in opinion with those, who hold that Odin was a warlike adventurer, from Asia, who, having traversed Eastern Europe, conquered Scandinavia and carried with him, not merely religious ideas, but the priests of that religion which was professed in Asgard ; that, actuated by political motives, he assumed the name and attributes of Woden, the All-father or earliest God of the Scandinavians, and in time became identified with him.

He conceives that Woden, Friga, and Thor, were the original chief deities of the North ; for, it is a curious fact that no historical and territorial circumstances appertain to Thor and Friga. They had only their cloud-wrapt dominions in Asaheim ; but, Odin is not only said to have had great possessions in Turkland, his original country, but to have established himself in Suithiod, to have built a temple, to have given domains to the temple-gods, to have taught arts to his subjects,

given them laws, levied scatt or poll-tax, and, in return for such tribute, engaged to defend the country, and defray the expences of sacrifice. At length he died in Suithiod, and Niord succeeded him. Freyr succeeded his father Niord, and assumed the epithet Yngve, a title which became distinctive of the Swedish dynasty, and dying, he was deified. His grandson Swegder, purposing to visit Godheim and Odin, went, with twelve companions, through the world, and reached Turkland and the Great Suithiod, where he found many of his connections, and returned to Sweden after an absence of five years.

Nothing of this kind is related of Friga or Thor; and of the Al-fader, not even a single mythological adventure has been recorded. In truth, he appears to have been the "Unknown God," the Self-existent, the Creator; who, having made the world, retired, and left it to be governed by sublunary deities.

His act of creation, has much in it which is sublime in conception and curiously coincides with the theoretical speculations of modern geologists; for,—In the Mist of Ages there were Muspel and Nifl, or the antagonistic principles

heat and cold. From Muspelsheim, torrents of fiery matter flowed into Niflheim, and there became condensed, in layers, in a vast abyss, over which was Ginnungrgap, a void of serene ætherous clouds, from which a light thin air was exhaled. Herein we have, as in the modern theory, a fluid fiery matter as the central mass, congealed on it's exterior into earths and rocks, and surrounded in space by an atmosphere. Into this simple account does all the mythological mystification appear to resolve itself. To this act of Creation ensued a destruction of the Antediluvian Earth (personated by Ymer the giant) and it's wicked inhabitants, by a flood, when Bergelmer, who happened to be in his boat, was saved. Then was the Earth re-modelled; the Sun, the Moon, the fixed and the wandering Stars produced; Aske and Emla, (the first man and woman,) the Dvergi or dwarfs, (the Alfr or elves and fairies,) created. The predicted destruction of this earth by fire, and it's renovation, and occupation by a better race, when the All-father shall be all in all, is calculated to make one pause, and wonder whence a tradition, so closely resembling the teaching of Christianity, could have been derived. But this is too large a subject to be other than thus briefly sketched.

Godheim and Manheim, two distinct regions, were held to exist. Godheim, or Asaheim, appears to have anciently meant, no more than the Eastern territory whence the Asæ issued upon their career of discovery and conquest, and to which Odin, on his death-bed, declared he was about to return: but, in process of time, a kind of territorial heaven, with mountains, plains, rivers and cities was devised, as it were floating over the actual earth, and in somewise corresponding with the territories held by the personages who were deified, and whose palaces were gold and silver; while, above this material heaven, glowed Vidlæn, the clear blue or celestial heaven, and, beyond these, was spread Oendlangeri, the boundless or Heaven-of-heavens, in which was a most brilliant palace, prepared for the perpetual abode of the Just: and, in this Boundless-heaven, Al-fader, the only and true God, was deemed to have his abode.

In proof that this was something like their conception, it may be well to say: The Alfr, male elves or fairies, lived in forests and woodlands. The earthly Alfheim was situate between the rivers Gotha and Glommen, but the celestial Alfheim was built of gold, and dwelt in by the

luminous genii; while the black genii resided beneath the earth. There were also Nornes, female elves or fairies, who dwelt on earth, but the Nornis, or Destinies, existed in Asaheim, and inhabited a palace by the fountain Under-brun.

This material-heaven, Asgard, or the peculiar abode of the Gods, was only accessible by the bridge Bifrost, (Rainbow) at the head of which Heimdaller was posted, apparently above his earthly territory Skania, to give warning of the predicted irruption of Surtur and his black legions, at the last day.

To enable the Gods to resist this expected assault, the souls of heroes were taken from the battle field by Odin, and maintained in his palaces Valhalla and Valgrind.

Of the ascertained form of the earth and circumambient ocean, the Heimskringla contains a most interesting account. Like the real, the mythological earth was encircled by a vast ocean, and, while the interior was inhabited by mankind, the Jotun and the Hrimthusse giants dwelt in the mountains and upon the shores of the sea. This residence would seem to have been on the

further shore of ocean, for, in the legend of Thor's journey along with Loke, Thialfe, and Raska, they are said to have swam the ocean before they reached the territory of Utgarda Loke, the necromantic giant.

Beneath the earth were the nine worlds of Hela, wherein the unheroic dead were retained until the Day of Judgment, and below these was Nastrond, the ultimate place of punishment for the irreclaimably wicked.

Such seems to have been the Northman's idea of the Heaven-of-heavens, of Heaven, Earth, Hades, and Hell; and, that highly curious conception, the sacred Ash-tree Ydrasil or Ygdrasil, was held to overshadow and unite them all.

The writer strongly suspects that this mystical tree was an ingeniously conceived embodiment of the whole system of Creation.—The roots reached the lowest depth, the branches extended over all the earth, the top reached into the highest heaven. It stretched over and prevaded every thing, while the Divine Providence was it's inhabiting spirit or vital principle.

The first root canopied Asaheim, and under it the Gods dwelt:—The second overspread Manheim and Jotunheim,—and the third impended over Niflheim.—Under each root was a mysterious fountain. The Heavenly lake was entitled Uder-brun or time-past, and, dwelling near to it, were the Nornis or Fates, who dispensed the Ages of Men, and were superior to the Gods themselves. That which embellished Earth was named Mimur or Minois: it was guarded by Mimr or Mimis, a being filled with wisdom and gifted with prophetic power. The fountain itself was oracular. That which rose in Hell bore the name Hvergelmer. It contained numberless snakes, but above all, the malicious serpent Nidhogur who was continually gnawing the roots of Ygdrasil, and who will hereafter be the perpetual tormentor of the damned.

In Uder-brun were two swans, which are supposed to represent foresight and knowledge. The four stags which coursed along the branches and ate the leaves, may impersonate the four winds. Egder the eagle, who sat in the topmost branches, may denote Active-Providence: the tree itself may shadow out inherent or essential Providence. Vederlæfner, the hawk sitting between

the eyes of Egder, may have indicated the Divine-vigilance, and Ratatosk the squirrel, may have represented ministerial Providence, or universal intelligence.

It is possible that, by the more enlightened, the whole was understood to mean that the birds of heaven, the beasts of the field, the reptiles of the earth, and all animated nature were alike divinely protected: but, it may be no overstrained and unwarrantable conjecture, that the mystical tree with it's oracular fountains and serpent, was not the mere fanciful creation of priests and poets, but a dim and dying recollection of the Tree of Knowledge: that Lærad, upon whose leaves the goat Heidruner fed, and whose dew drops falling upon the antlers of the stag Eikthryner, supplied the rivers of Heaven, of Earth, and of the Vale of Death, is but the faded memorial of the Tree of Life, and that the Rainbow-Bridge, with it's edge of raging fire, which connects Earth to Heaven, is something more than the beautiful creation of a highly poetical mind. A flaming sword guarded the way to the Tree of Life.

The writer thinks that the legend of Balder and his untimely fate, may also be suggestive of

more than appears upon the surface. Words are lavished, and seem to fail adequately to describe the brilliant radiance of the beloved God, his mental and his bodily perfection. All the elements and every thing in existence, except the Misteltein, having promised not to injure Balder, the Gods, notwithstanding his fearfully ominous impression of impending danger, were enjoying themselves in their Feasting-Hall, and, in their frolic mirth, had stationed him as a mark to be aimed at. Loke gave to blind Hoder a Mistletoe shrub, he threw it and unwittingly slew the God, and Loke, disguised as the old witch Thok, having refused to weep for his death, Balder was compelled to remain in the realm of Hela. After the destruction of the Terrestrial Gods, he, with his brother Hoder, will return to the renovated Earth, and in the plain of Eytha, will find the golden dice of the Gods. Lif (life) and Lifthrafer (Vital heat) are then to replenish the earth with a new race. Such is a very short sketch of the highly interesting account.

The writer suggests the possibility of this beautiful God being an embodiment of Truth. If so it would run thus: Truth (Balder) through the artifice of Fraud (Loke) is destroyed by

Chance (Hoder) and cast out from heaven. But, as even the social state of Gods could not exist without some semblance of Truth, his son Forsete or Foréster, the God of Justice, remained to appease all quarrels. Perfect truth might be banished from society, and it's affairs proceed, however imperfectly, but without Justice it could not exist at all.

He does not pretend that these are solutions to be relied upon, but only offers them as suggestions, pointing towards a developement of the systematic construction of this curious mythology. It would require a much higher order of intellect than he possesses, adequately to examine the whole subject, and compare it with other mythologies so as to make them elucidate each other; and—if it could be done, would it be worth the doing?

It is however but fair to state, that another view may be taken of the tradition. Balder was king of Angeln. Might it not have been a question among the Gods, his relatives, whether he could not have a territory apportioned to him in Scandinavia, and not remain shut out from the sacred land; and that Loke, to gratify some petty

jealousy, (eaten the witch-wife's heart) succeeded in having it settled that Balder should remain where he was ; and that the historical fact, in an age of fable, was mystified into it's present form ?

To enumerate all the Gods, giants, dwarfs, and other fabrications of the prolific brains of priests and poets, and to describe their attributes and fabulous adventures, it is feared would not only be unprofitable, but tedious. Many allusions to these have, intentionally, been introduced in the text, so that the careful reader need not be wholly at a loss : but, as to our ears, which have been tampered with by Grecian deities, the epithets "she" applied to the Sun, and "he" to the Moon, sound strange ; the writer thinks it well to state, that, among the Northmen, Dagr, or day, is a male, but Sunna, the driver of his car, is a female : Nott, or night, is a female, but Mane, the driver of her car, is a male. These servile employments were given to them by the Gods, in punishment of their father for having given such fine names to his beautiful children. Mane, perhaps feeling lonely, stole Bil and Huike, as they were carrying a pitcher of water between them, and they became his inseparable attendants. In his boyhood, these were pointed out to the

writer, as two very little stars closely adjoining to, and travelling with the moon, but unfortunately he never could see them.

A connection is more than hinted at, between the fabled deities of the various ages and countries, and the fallen spirits. The use of these was conceived to be needful, seeing that the actors in the narrative are Christians, and Pagans; people of the same descent, with superstitions, with legendary fabrications, very similar in character and equally incredible, although the pure teaching of God's Most Holy Book, and the wild doctrines of Spae-wives and Scalds, are so widely different.

The power attributed to the Evil Spirits over mankind, the writer conceives to be quite consistent with the then existing belief of both parties, neither of whom would have discredited any amount or kind of superhuman interposition; he therefore has not scrupled to make such uses of the demons as a Scald would have done.

Considering Angels to be only Ministring spirits, he has not chosen to use them irreverently, nor to invent such vile and degrading falsehoods as disgraced the credulous Christianity of the day.

The allusion to a rite, somewhat similar to Christian Baptism, is justified by this passage in The Runic Chapter, or Magic of Odin. “*If I will that a man should neither fall in battle nor perish by the sword, I sprinkle him over with water at the instant of his birth.*” The practice is repeatedly mentioned in the Heimskringla, the name given being generally that of some renowned warrior, whose spirit was supposed to be thus transfused into the child. Thora Mosterstang “was descended from good people, being connected with Horda-Kaare, and was moreover a very stout and remarkably handsome girl. She was called the king’s servant girl, for at that time many were subject to service to the king, who were of good birth, both men and women. Then it was the custom, with people of consideration, to choose with great care the man who should pour water over their children, and give them a name. Now when the time came that Thora, who was then at Moster, expected her confinement; she would go to King Harald, who was then living at Sæim, and she went northwards in a ship belonging to Earl Sigurd. They lay at night close to the land, and there Thora brought forth a child, upon the land, up among the rocks, close to the ship’s gangway, and it was a man-

child. Earl Sigurd poured water over him, and called him Hakon, after his own father Hakon Earl of Lade. The boy soon grew handsome, large in size, and very like his father King Harald. King Harald let him follow his mother, and they were both in the king's house as long as he was an infant."

Although the object of the quotation is complete, the picture of ancient manners contained in the following paragraphs is so fresh, as compared with our early histories, that the writer ventures upon their insertion.

"At this time a king, called Athelstan, had taken the kingdom of England. He sent men to Norway, to King Harald, with the errand that the messengers should present him with a sword, with the hilt and handle gilt, and also the whole sheath adorned with gold and silver, and set with precious jewels. The ambassadors presented the sword-hilt to the king, saying, "Here is a sword which King Athelstan sends thee, with the request that thou wilt accept it." The king took the sword by the handle; whereupon the ambassadors said, "Now thou hast taken the sword, according to our king's desire, and therefore art thou his

subject, as thou hast taken his sword." King Harald saw now that this was a jest, for he would be subject to no man. But he remembered it was his rule, whenever any thing raised his anger, to collect himself and let his passion run off, and then take the matter into consideration coolly. Now he did so, and consulted his friends, who all gave him the advice to let the ambassadors, in the first place, go home in safety.

The following summer, King Harald sent a ship westward to England, and gave the command of it to Hauk Haabrok, He was a great warrior, and very dear to the king. Into his hands he gave his son Hakon. Hauk proceeded westward to England and found the King in London, where there was, just at the time, a great feast and entertainment. When they came to the hall, Hauk told his men how they should conduct themselves, namely, that he who went first in should go last out, and all should stand in a row at the table, at equal distance from each other, and each should have his sword at his left side, but should fasten his cloak so that his sword should not be seen. Then they went into the hall, thirty in number. Hauk went up to the king and saluted him, and the king bade him welcome. Then Hauk took the child

Hakon, and set it on the king's knee. The king looks at the boy, and asks Hauk what the meaning of this is? Hauk replies, "Harald the King bids thee foster his servant girl's child." The King was in great anger, and siezed a sword which lay beside him, and drew it as if he was going to kill the child. Hauk says, "Thou hast borne him on thy knee, and thou canst murder him if thou wilt, but thou wilt not make an end of all King Harald's sons by so doing." On that, Hauk went out with all his men, and took the way direct to his ship, and put to sea,—for they were ready,—and came back to King Harald. The King was highly pleased with this, for it is the common observation of all people, that the man who fosters another's children is of less consideration than the other. From these transactions between the two kings, it appears that each wanted to be held greater than the other; but, in truth, there was no injury to the dignity of either, for each was the upper king in his own kingdom till his dying day.

King Athelstan had Hakon baptised, and brought up in the right faith, and in good habits, and all sorts of exercises, and he loved Hakon above all his relations, and Hakon was beloved

by all men. Athelstan was a man of understanding, and eloquence, and also a good Christian. King Athelstan gave Hakon a sword, of which the hilt and handle were gold, and the blade still better, for with it, Hakon cut down a mill-stone to the centre-eye, and the sword thereafter was called the Quernbiter. Better sword never came into Norway, and Hakon carried it to his dying day."

The writer is perfectly sensible that, in execution, this attempt has fallen far below, even his own weak and imperfect conception of what such a work should be. He is perfectly sensible how unworthy it is, as a memorial of the truly great man whose deeds he has aspired to speak of, yet he cannot summon resolution to destroy the amusement of advanced age, when nature is yielding to the effects of a life passed, not among books, not in luxurious ease, not in rural enjoyment, but in benumbing drudgery, but in the turmoil and vexation necessarily incident to City life, but in (and that was not necessarily incident to City life,) trying to bear up against pertinacious annoyance, and wrong, and insult, and in an employment, humble and useful, but sadly unintellectual: nor would he wholly efface work,

which has been to him the consolation of an almost total confinement to the house, and which, in God's gracious and merciful Providence, has solaced him under privations beneath which he might otherwise have sunk.

In commending it to the indulgence of friends, he feels that he has not much to fear. Of strangers, he can only ask that consideration for the rude effort of an isolated and unlettered man, which, under like circumstances, they would wish extended to themselves.

He has to express his deep obligation to the authors whose works he has consulted. They are not many, for much was not within his reach, but to him they were invaluable.

Annales Rerum Gestarum Ælfredi Magni, Auctore
Asserio :

The Heimskringla, translated by Samuel Laing :

Icelandic Poems, translated by A. S. Cottle :

Northern Antiquities, translated from Monsr. Mallet :

The History of the Anglo-Saxons, by Sharon Turner :

have been his chief authorities. Although with them he has done but little, without them he could not have done anything.

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A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE FIRST.

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B O O K T H E F I R S T .

Hubba the Sea-king, having devastated Demetia, is driven out of his course and descries Kynvit. The origin of Hrafn, the Magical Standard of the Danes.

In fear, in trembling, in humility,
Unnamed, unnoted, shrinking in myself
Feebly I sing. What hand shall dare awake
The heroic lyre long slumbering? Who shall dare
Essay his puny flight toward that ascent
Where, on their ivory thrones, by fame emblazed
Sit, in their majesty, ennobled bards,
Who, from the misty height look down sublime
In grandeur unapproachable; in mind
Giants of godlike mould, eagles, whose cyc

Could, fixed and steadfast, at the blazing sun
Gaze undismayed, unharmed ; eagles, whose wing,
No feather bent or ruffled, could untired
Sweep through their heaven of heavens ; whose fierce clutch
Could grasp the lightning of their hero gods
And pour their volleyed thunders. Who shall dare
Aught, but with reverent and quailing eye
To gaze, and flit, where they could boldly soar ?

Spirit of Freedom ! from thy mountain hold,
And from thy torrent force, and from thy wave,
And from thy wind look down : Bless, bless my song :
Be thou my muse :—Come to my midnight watch
Come to my waking dream :—With thy strong hand
Strike the resounding string :—Be earth, be heaven
Thine eager auditors ; and as thy strain
Swells with the glowing theme, may worlds on worlds
Honour thee, love thee, cherish thee ; be thou
Irradiant Spirit ! only less revered
Than Him, the Highest, who made all men free.—

If to ethereal realms thy flight aspire,
Lowly and reverent be thine abased wing :
Into eternal horrors shouldst thou plunge,
Unsoiled soar upward :—If the battle rage ;
Sweep on the hurrying blast, until war abhor
Turn from, and loathe himself :—In sacred peace,
In love, in truth, in radiant mirthfulness
Bathe thy melodious chords, 'till the full heart
Vibrate and throb with pleasure : so may I
Glad Freedom ! live in thine awakening song.—

The sun has set in blood ; fleet, threatening clouds

Winged by the demon of the storm, sweep on
Athwart the brooding stillness ; wide the waves
Deep muttering, flash with pale unearthly light.
Nurtured in storm, the pirate holds his breath,
Scans with experienced eye the deepening gloom,
And with foreboding shudders.—Onward the king
Despite of storm, of portent, bids them hold
Southward their course : and on The Dragon holds,
Rising and bounding to the measured stroke
Of the adept oarsman ; sublimest music never
Beat truer to creative influence. Onward holds
The gallant bark her way. The waters, dark
As her own war-worn sides, surge fire as the sweeps
Tear up the wave-crest ; the exulting prow
Proud in her domination, dashes the foam
Into glittering fire : far, far in her wake
The labouring fleet hold on, each pallid shield
Ranged along the breastwork, in as threatening fire
That threatening ocean reflects. That ghastly light
Is alone in that dreary gloom. Still, fierce as bold,
Holds Hubba his furious course ; and firmly steers
As an arrow flight right on ; his stars, the fires
Red in Demetia raging, dimly fading
As his strong men in fearless energy
The groaning sweep to the brawny breast bring home.
Vain are the curses of Demetia's bards,
Vain are the curses of Demetia's priests,
Vain the shrill curses of Demetia's maidens,
Maidens no more.—Howling, the evening wolf
Turns from the fœtid feast, the thrice foul food

Is by the raven loathed.—Cruel, his wrath
Here is unrighteous : Saxon, not British crime
Was it his to punish : yet in lust or hate
Onward his vengeful course, dreadless the king
Holds and rejoices. On his daring prow
Hrafn floats pitiless, in her pride floats
Hrafn the Magical Standard, from whose eye
Flee thousands, and, fierce tramping in her path
Proud thousands press.—No hand, no mortal hand
That fateful texture wove : no mortal hand
Embroidered Odin's bird.—Proudly elate
In their own hall, victorious, overjoyed
As the bright eyes of loved ones gaily roamed
O'er silk, o'er gold, o'er helmet, spear, or shield ;
Trophies of plundered provinces, rich stores
For war or for luxurious ease : his spear,
Graven with Runic spell unerringly
To speed it's straight course to the foeman's heart,
Sat Inguar polishing ; the serpent-eyed
Sigurd, and Huitsærk brave, upon war intent,
Marshalled their mimic warriors, warily
Guiding the strife, and holding Frankland king
In check by Scanian knight.—No summer cloud
Shaded their path. Intently listening
Stood Inguar, as intently listening
Sat his fierce brethren, living yet motionless :
Each gleaming eye as instantaneously
Consulted, counselled, resolved.—Ragnar the proud,
'The daring, the dauntless ; Ragnar the warrior bard,
Ragnar the king among kings, Ragnar whose spear

Rejoiced every tribe of heaven, whose swift sword
Glutted every wolf to the full, in his mortal agony
Had exultingly cried "revenge"!—"Revenge, revenge"
As with one tongue they cried: Fionia cried
"Revenge": Seeland through all her wastes re-echoing,
Shouted "Revenge": Juteland's wild solitude
Each briny marsh, each creek, each heaving bay
Shouted "Revenge": Hoar ocean in his wrath
Muttered "Revenge": the still increasing cry
Streamed from each fiord, roared in each cataract
Thundered adown each torrent:—Odinsöe
Cried, and Sigtuna answered: far Novogorod
Heard from Eysyssel the awakening note,
And roused her for revenge: Suithiod, Helsingia
And Angermannland's heights inaccessible
And rocks precipitous, in rage cried out:
Swiftly the harsh cry rose from Tornea,
Leaped every cataract-pouring barrier,
And from Enontekis, bade all the North
Bestir them for revenge:—Rugged, sublime,
And black, and dangerous, snow-clad the Lofodens
Awakened and poured forth their hardy sons
Toil strung and fierce: Mahels^troëm, Saltenstroëm,
Howled in their might convulsive, answering
To startled Sulitelma: each torrent flood
White foaming, every deep-blue fiord, each black
Each frowning precipice, each threatening cleft
Rolled along the impetuous tempest: "Revenge, revenge,"
Mingled in the howling rain: "Revenge, revenge,"
Blazed in the meridian sun: "Revenge, revenge,"

Burned as a terrific meteor :—shuddering earth
Shrunk from the fearful glare.—The Council-horn
Had uttered but one note, the cloven arrow
Flown but from hand to hand ; and as one man
Every bold heart had risen : red, red revenge,
And blood, and fire, and plunder, urging every
Determined, fearless arm.—Sex, rank, age, youth,
In the mad turmoil mingling, cried “ Revenge,”
And the wide-gathering storm held hard it’s breath
Ere it should pour terrifically strong
All overwhelming.—Such wide-wasting blaze
Had one cruel deed enkindled.—Fierce were the sons
Fierce were the daughters ; princess, priestess,
Far seeing prophetess, each saw, each knew
This was no common strife of race with race ;
Deeper, deadlier object nerved each sinewy arm,
And every passion stood enlisted in
The contest of faith against faith : and for that strife
They launched their gallant barks, and fearlessly
Breasted the hurrying surge : and though the gulph
Black with ten thousand deaths, might roar, might rage,
Their’s was the task, and their’s the hearts to bear
And hands to do it.—Slowly, solemnly,
Each in her own high purpose resolute,
Thora, Aslauga, Norna, Ragnar’s daughters,
Folded around their sacred vestments, azure
As the wide cope of heaven ’dropped with stars ;
Around each towering neck, clear as the crest
Of high Snæhattan veined with pearly streams,
Twined the mysterious rings : pure in intensity

Of extremest blackness, the unpolluted lamb
Had yielded it's silken fleece, and the familiar
Of necromantic arts, her virgin white
Fur had contributed: the raven hair
Glowed in it's glossy curves beneath such helm
Girt with a golden diadem: each hand
White in itself, shrouded in whitest fur
Bore the white mystic wand, willow the shaft
The head far beaming gold: so on they moved
Reverenced and reverential.—The hot heart
Which bounded at the battle cry, drew back
The blood from every cheek; chill, shuddering silence
Unnerved the trembling knees, and warriors shook
Awe stricken.—Gliding smoothly, soundlessly
On still they passed: the ever deepening gloom
Enveloped them, concealed them.—Silently
The sacred corn they crushed, still silently
Moulded the sacred cakes, strewed pungent seeds
And poured in milk and honey:—As the flame
Fed on the holy food, clearly resounding
Sang they in cadence measured: “Wondrous Queen!
Queen of all Earth! Queen of Valhalla! Queen
Of all the boundless Heaven in it's brightness,
Hear! be propitious.—Thunder-bearing God!
Thou who enthroned upon the mountain crest
In revered majesty dost sit, whose arm
Smote down the giants, bound the Artificer
Of Fraud in his own leash; thou, the dread God
All might, all fortitude, before whose vast,
Overwhelming prowess, all in heaven and earth

Bow and submit, hear thou, be thou propitious!—
But chiefly thou, All-Father! God supreme!
God of red slaughter! God of Victory!
Selector of the slain! God of the living!
God of the dead! O Asa, Omi, Asa,
Hear thou! be thou propitious.—Hear ye, all
Ye Gods, ye Goddesses! but chiefly ye
Odin, and Thor, and Valhalla's beauteous, glorious,
All knowing, all resplendent, bounteous Queen
Hear ye! be ye propitious."—So in faith
Entreating and invoking, steadily resolved
In their high patriot purpose, firm they stood,
And would have stood had hell itself gaped wide,
Strong nerved for fateful task.—Nastrond sent up
Intoxicating mist: noneless it rose
Dense as deep sleep, as deep sleep closely locking
Every sense in its close brooding.—As sleeping fixed
Vacant, of all unconcious, on mysteriously
Plied they the fearful task; and as it grew
Beneath their plastic fingers, grim, savage joy
With its growth grew, and every beauteous form
Grew beautifully demoniac.—Red Revenge
Waved her blood-writhen daggers, plunging high
And swiftly with fierce aim: with croaking cry
And haggard eyes, and hair as fire wide streaming
In her path on she bade them: onward sped,
Still plying their vengeful task impetuously,
The Pilgrims of Revenge.—Rugged the path
Drear, dark, and dangerous; black choking mists
Repulsed them, yet they still, still, still pressed on

Firm clinging, or with hand or foot, though hearing
Deep, deep beneath, above, and all around,
Waters resounding, roaring, chafing, howling :
Slimy bogs, wide whirlpools hemmed them, foul the abyss
Yawned, an unfathomable gulph ; above,
Height, unending height, around, on either hand
Space all illimitable, and the dim dangerous way
Broken and splintered, heaved and convulsedly reeled.
Dark, dark, all dark, save where phosphorescent meteors
Bickering from the fires of angry Muspellsheim
Lighted, but to deceive and dazzle, wheresoever
Most needed soonest extinguished : yet the red star
Of cherished vengeance lured them ; they pressed on
Nine weary days, days as whole years in length,
Nine wearier nights than the wan moon ever knew :
Stumbling they fell, they clung, they griped, they climbed ;
Wading they floundered, sunk yet still emerged :
Falling they flew, and flying still they fell ;
Buoyant still sinking, sinking buoyant still ;
And, ever and anon, the treacherous way
All slime, all mire, sedged with repulsive weeds,
Putrescent and abominable, offended
All the senses at one moment :—Through the dim density
Fighting along ; inaudibly they heard
They indistinctly saw, prowling around
A monster, nor of hell nor utmost earth,
Twi-formed, not human, nor yet wholly brute
Fearful, yet innoxious.—Where the dark streams roll
Of farthest Jotunheim, on Earths drear edge
She lived, Joruna named. Though bent on speed

Stayed they in question.—² I was more as yet,
High waxed the powerful wind, in my stormy strife
Firm held the warring winds, the elements
At my word were hushed infants ; pride of strength
Led me to urge the immense giant hand
When on Asgard war they waged ; the searing fires
Of the strong Thunderer, drove them howling back,
And, cleaving their rocky foreheads, steep down fixed them
As mountains for ever. I in the turmoil
Wounded fell, not destroyed, and here drag on
That cruel immortality, which lives
Thus but to die ; for I was goddess born
To a mortal father : glorious beauty now
Is hidden in this shaggy hide, mercifully given
By pitying gods.—All my presumptuous pride
Hunken in noisome abjectness, envying
Ghosts prowl I upon this confine, miserable,
Trembling and pallid, haggard, execrable,
They may waste out, but I can never die.”—
No moaning and no yelling, on she plashed
The miry slough.—Painfully, wearily,
Onward they hied, and resolutely bent
Snuffed the less darksome air, joying in the light
Sulphureous that from the shores of Niflheim
Made darkness less indistinct.—Far on the right
Lay the eastern portal ; there, involved in deep,
Black, poisonous mist, wrapped in eternal snows,
Hurled in thick-ribbed ice, the prophetess
Valva for ever sleeps. She erstwhile spake
Of Balder's death, conjured emphatically

And by Runic spell enforced.—That passed they by,
Nor paused to question Modgudder, portress keen
Of that attenuated bridge which leads
Towards the Northern gate direct; nor stayed she them,
Knew she the privileged garb, the powerful wand,
And bent obeisant. The golden arch
Shook not beneath their transient step, so swiftly
Sped they and reached Hell Gate, high threatening, huge,
It gaped, and frowned sublime. Terrific fires
Far in the distance glowed: here intermittingly
They flashed and sunk into darkness, increasing
The furiously dissonant roar of the wide stream
Spanned by the golden bridge; vain splendour wasted
Upon such dreary way, save that such bridge
Oft tempts man into hell. Hell Gate, instinctively
Upon it's pivots shrieked, opening to admit
Closing to retain: not the united strength
Of giant myriads, not the concentrated might
Of gods, each the weakest able to uproot
The everlasting mountains, could heave up
One adamantine bar. They opened, moans
And agonized cries, and flakes of flame,
The pestiferous vapours burthened; loud over all
Bayed Garmer, vast, hideous and horrible,
Amid rank surfeit wallowing, cloyed with flesh
Snapped from each howling corpse, his iron teeth
Foul with torn fibres, and his frothy tongue
With filthy putrescence livid: jaws, breast, limb,
And every hair upon each separate limb,
Fœtid with slimy gore, still to the stretch

Of his crammed throat yelping. Far they trembling shrunk
Though to shrink unused, to hesitate untaught,
So fearfully his blue eyes glared : they shrunk,
For fiend so repulsively featured they had thought
Could not live, even in hell, and they had trod
Back through or syrt, or whirlpool, but that Revenge
Irresistibly led them onward.—Casting swiftly
Each, into his ravening maw, her honied cate,
Hardly they escaped, nor dared they shuddering look
Back to the loud-yelling hound, whose sevenfold rage
Wreaked on the entering ghosts the vengeful malice
Of his disappointed maw.—So on they fared
Persisting, and nor turning right nor left,
But trampling down, overthrowing, piercing through,
Millions of shades, to The Wailing and Shrieking stream.
There lay immersed all those whose recreant souls
Bent down, aye licked a conqueror's feet, and begged
Dishonour's morsel. Onward, and they reached
The hollow Black-eddying Whirlpool ; there engulfed
Incessantly ever, for ever, hurled around,
Lay Ingialld lay Aasa, Suithiod's fiends :
He, the wolf's heart had eaten, wolfish appetite
For cruelty was his ; he, seeking power
Gained it, but vengeance tarried not ; such fire
As he had for others lighted, gnawed upon
Him and his demon daughter : here retained
Mutually they curse and curse ; the penal fire
In every fibre festering, respite knows not
But in the whirl still burns unquenchably ;
So perish cruelty.—The adjacent stream

Along, and adjacent lands vindictive tempests
Madly careering, poured unceasingly
Into The Gulph of Ages all who lived,
By idleness voluptuously debauched,
Tempting and tempted : Swift Perdition yawns
Beneath rocks precipitous, on the instant mouldering
Whenever touched, and wide beyond, extends
The Realm of Death, river and land both named
'Thus for their dreary emptiness. Nor mound
Nor funeral stone, though full to satiety,
Marks one poor grave ; all here are buried quick
And know themselves alive, though earth knows not
That ever they lived or died, so ignoble,
Even evil fame had never noted them.—
Far onward lies that dull, scarcely creeping stream
The Foe of Joy, where hungry misers count,
Still count their gold and crave, and crave on still :
Treasures of gold and gems ceaselessly pass
Their gaping mouths, yet still they cry " more, more ".—
Of The Ninefold Region, girding the inmost curve
With groans, howls, shrieks, and misery filled, they see
Serpents revolting, each of intenser torment
As each the victim stings successively,
Him, who there outstretched, helpless and bed-ridden
Writhes like a puling child. Pity had pleaded
But Detestation held her mute. The sisters
Asked of his crime, and he, with infant wail
Confessed to its strict justice : " I am Aun,
Aun the undying one, who had ten lives
Yet lost all wanting the eleventh. I was old

Was very very old ; life grew the sweeter
As I the older grew : when Destiny
Called for her victim, I to Odin gave
My eldest child, and so successively
For every son increase of life I gained
Though every joy had fled ; though food was placed
Upon my tongue with a weanling infant's horn
And stifled me in the swallowing, I still,
Still craved for life : I would have slain the tenth
Had not my rebellious people, cruelly
Denied my craving. I perforce brought here
Here have my wish ; I live, but live accursed,
Justly accursed in torment to implore
For the death I fled from ; now death flees from me
And, ever threatening to strike, for ever
Taunting the stroke delays." Yelled the sharp snakes,
And he yelled as they stung him : deeper still
They stung and stung, as in a mirrored scene
He saw his nine sons, throned in Odin's hall
And every child abhorred him. Still still the snakes
Sting him for ever. He of all his fellows
Life-gripping most, most loathed, despised of all
Heaving, convulsed, and writhing, louder wails.—
The ever lamenting flood, and yawning clefts
Lining the precipitous banks, perpetually
Spout poison : Misery the baleful stream
And all around, it's rocks, it's shoals, it's weeds,
Despairing misery.—Here ended road,—
Here wade they must, retreat impossible
Persistence impracticable. Though armed with power

They stood irresolute ; yet safety alone
Upon resolution hung.—Long had they stood
With the danger parleying, had not Revenge
Imaged the thick gloom o'er with serpents fierce,
Piercing to Ragnar's manly heart, and him,
Fiercely convulsed with forced laughter.—Adventurously
Plunged they the depth, learning how dizzily deep
Is the threshold of Aliudner. In the waves
They plunged and plunged, as every shrieking ghost
Clung and twined round them. At one desperate leap
Hela's dark hall they gained, it's entrance sad
Dismal with tears, and groans, and wretchedness,
Immeasurable, vast, high overarched
With dense obscurity, dimly palpable
To aching sight, where the vexed eye-ball strained
To intensity of suffering, sunk subdued,
And terrifying faintness, faintness that sickened
Into it's very self, exhausted drooped.—
Deep in it's darkness, cursings and howlings dire
Coursed through the curtained folds, and every tone
Of extremest anguish, acutest agony,
In horrible chorus interwoven, shrieked,
As Expectation craving, Delay lingering,
Adversely strove, tearing and torturing
The miserable souls.—Sickness and Pain, her couch,
Famine, her table, ever ravening Hunger
Her eager knife, with nothing to devour ;
Here in her inmost cavern, Hela sits
Bidding welcome to all guests. In presence sensible
Though imperceptible, a visioned fiend

Impalpable, untraceable ; ghastly in pallidness
Her form, if form it be, below where waist should be
Dull blue, if colour in such formless form
Visible were. So, on her shadowy throne
Sits Hela, or reclines, or leans, or stands,
Or broods, and before her, glowing gloriously,
Sits Balder, Nanna sits : around them spread
Horses, fleet dogs, ships, armour, treasures rich,
As they consumed were upon the funeral pyre,
In essential substance here each purpose serve :
Golden their couch, in wide circumference
His golden shield their kingly canopy.—
Fjolner here, who in the waveless sea
Too late found out the drunkard could have too much :
Swegder who, reeling, his forefather sought
Sought and died clenched the living rock within :
Vanland, to death by hideous Mara tramped :
Domar, through fire who gained his father's throne :
Alric and Eric, neither distinguishable,
With mangled heads, each with a bridle armed,
Sit as they died by fâtricial wounds :—
And, fâtricial, through a woman's love
Yngve and Alf : Yngve in war expert
Generous and handsome and of mirthful mood,
Flushed with red conquest ; silent, harsh, and sullen
Alf, friendless, of all regardless, Bera oft sat
Until chilling dew dropped from night's ebon wing
Still fascinated fascinating, and forgetful
In her exuberant mirth, that Alf slept lone
While the gay cup circled. Yngve's exulting heart

Gushed hot o'er his brother's blade, yet his good sword
Prone as he fell, struck through Alf's gurgling throat
And dying, not in war, though violently,
Here abide they ever.—Grieving not miserable,
Weeping yet not tormented, wide the gloom
Is thick with shadows thronged. Pale, terror stricken,
From precipice, from flood, still pouring in,
And from dank beds of pining penury,
And pestilence, and plague: high pampered luxury
To thousands adds ten thousands.—Frozen, in
Astonishment sit those who fondly thought
By dying upon their beds in iron armed
At Odin's board to feast: keen scorn, hooting, mockery,
And insolence, and braggart contumely,
Delighted scream as the air-distended skins
Sound on each dizzied skull; and, footballs made,
The would-be warriors roll, or bound, or leap,
Amid irrepressible jeers, when honesty
On the wasting death-couch had insured them peace
Albeit inglorious.—Her unsubstantial reign
Co-aged with creation, far extending
Over nine realms, and every realm a world,
Outcast of heaven, of earth, reigns Hela the stern,
Reigns Hela the irresistible; sovereign secure
Where all is unsubstantial, nought is sure.—
Dauntless, the maids, to her, in regal pride
Though suppliants, bowed not, but majestically
Deliberate, and with eyes that dared defy
Where other eyes were blinded, upon the brink
Of a cavernous depth, at the altar's foot

Slaughtered nine lambs fresh from the teeming ewe
Sacredly black ; and, chanting monotonously
Scattered around from white wands, waved on high,
Dark, powerful Runic spells. The curdling blood
Into the depth they poured : nine sable cocks
Full fed and pure from stain died motionless,
And honied mead with sulphur duly mixed
And hydromel sprinkled upon the lurid flame
Slowly consumed, ascended in savoury steams ;
And, as the rolling fumes the void obscured,
In intermitted pain the shades rejoiced,
And the dread monarch indistinctly seemed
With enjoyment almost lustrous :—"Mighty queen,
Of power extensive as all shrouding Night,
Throned over nine worlds uncurbed sovereign,
Arbitress final, whose firm will is fate
Hear us, oh hear !—Of Ragnar's royal stock
Daughters, to nerve our people seek we of thee
Power and mysterious art, rightly to weave
Hrafn, the consuming, conquering, triumphing.
'That wondrous art O teach us ! where and how
So to atchieve our task, that death all-grasping,
Her vengeful path may track, blithe victory
Cling to her streaming folds, that rapine and blood,
Famine and pestilence, may pour into
'Thy all-engulphing rivers, spoil to fill them
Even to overflowing.—Dread Goddess hear,
Hear thou and grant !"—Muttering, above them high
As strained sight could pierce, nine thunders deep
Distantly reverberating, indistinctly heard,

Unuttering rolled : where visual orbs should have been
Pale faded nine lambent fires ; such sound, such look
Smote them on eye and ear. Thrice, as it were
A sceptre seemed to point, bewildered they
Towards the dim distance staggered ; a grim smile
Seemed, for it was not, pleasure betokening
In their divining, and the mist-demon huge
With uncouth merriment heaved.—A sickly haze
Far off, sight deceiving, than all else more light
Though to eyes of Earth dark as all Erebus,
Their onward speed prompted, not unrecompensed :—
Straight from his couch, quitting the honied mead,
Quitting the dear side of his faithful wife,
Rose Balder beaming brightness ; goodlier form
Rejoiced in nor God nor man, even obscurity
In his smile grew beauteous, and the high-arched roof
With ponderous icicles pendent, and vast rocks
Thick set and threatening, shone effulgently
His glances reflecting : eyes admiring
Followed his stately tread, and as he spoke
Music wide floating poured it's dulcet tones
On every pregnant air, and breathing loves
Rejoicing gambolled to the blithesome notes :
Vengeance slept calmly, and they journeyed on
Exempt from sorrow, listening to his tongue.—
“ Yonder, high curving in fantastic folds,
Stretches the third vast root of Ygdrasil,
Spanning athwart Hvergelmer, noisome pool
Deep, dark, and dangerous, and immeasurable
By mortal senses ; ye can hear it's snakes

Even at this distance ; and enormous, foul,
And livid with corruption, can discern
Nidhoggur rolling his dread bulk along,
Twisting, compressing, and in ceaseless hate
Gnawing the mighty root :—so will he gnaw
Yet harm not the immortal tree.—Eternally,
When universal ruin has buried all
Earth and material heaven, leagues leagues below,
In horrible Nastrond, shore of the accursed,
Rending the utterly outcast, will he wallow
And fill his craving maw, and void, and fill
His craving maw again.—Nine rivers thence
In twining circuit, ye have crossed them all,
Issue and enfold the regions of Niflheim :
Regions that were or ever Earth was formed,
Regions that shall be Earth exist or not,
Each than the next more dolorous :—These from the earth
Receive the crime-poisoned waters, those from heaven
Draw their supply, and the pure central lake
Whence Heaven's own beauteous rivers ceaseless flow,
Is for ever replenished by the holy dews
Dropping from Lœrada, that tree of life
Whence food for mighty men and mightier gods
Proudly heroic is profusely drawn,
Next wondrous to Ygdrasil. Yet, 'ere we quit,
To you this rugged road, whose marle is ice
Instinct with fiery veins sharp bickering,
Task hard your searching sight. Ye see yon mount
Shattered, misshapen, whose smoke-hidden top
Reaches from Niflheim to utmost Earth,

And ye can hear the dissonant roaring rush
Of the mad waters leaping, close by the black
Ever boiling cauldron :—See, three jagged stones
Starting up abruptly ;—do ye see that form
Distorted, and bent down, and manacled,
And fettered, and rivetted firmly ? One pointed stone
Pierces his chafed shoulders, one beneath
Cuts into his arching loins, the last receives
And rends his bleeding hams ; high o'er his head
Pendent a snake, still drop, still drop by drop,
Distils upon his face the venom sharp,
And, ever as the oft-replenished bowl
Held up by Segnie is awhile removed,
The agonizing fluid biting through
Flesh, bone, and brain, Loke writhing and convulsed
Shakes the incumbent rocks, and Nature heaves
In direst trepidation : earthquakes hence
Their origin derive.—Mangled in death
Outstretched and covering acres, lies the carcase
Of Vali ; he with Nari drew his birth
From Loke, artificer of fraud ; me slain
By my blind brother, in miscalled mischance,
And here retained to sojourn, through his fraud,
In bitterly sorrowing anger the dread gods
Sieved upon his offspring, one into a ravenous,
Ferocious wolf they changed, whose appetite
Swallowed his brother ; slaying him, they twined
His entrails into cords and bound the sire
With the fruit of his own loins, infliction just.
Upon the hither bank, twin monument

Gapes Fenris, offspring of Angerboda
The witch-wife, Loke his reputed sire.
Straining the magically compacted line
Finely soft, delicate, scarcely perceptible,
Yet of strength-defying tecture, fiercely he rolls
His livid eye balls ; from his slavering jaws
Coating the shaggy breast, and clotting down
From rock to plain, thick, black, and wide, and deep,
Pours along the River of Vices. There shall he strain
The strangling clue until Ragnarokr flame
In the eastern clime. The attenuated thread
Snaps not, nor can his strength nor all the strength
Of witches, giants, genii, loose it's hold.—
Midgard's vile serpent-monster hurled from heaven
Encompasses all earth, the gaping head
Touching the scorpion tail. In the uttermost depth,
Depth where to sound no mariner's plummet dips,
Stretching across vales, o'er mountains, deep engulfed
Spreads the mysterious beast: wide ocean heaves
With him in ground swells, and the appalling race
Of billowy mountains over mountains pouring,
When huge Hræsvelger stretches his giant wings
And sways the tempest from them, feebly mark
His least-exerted might ; might not to be known
At it's utmost extent, until the fatal bark
Built up of dead men's nails, shall, launched career
Laden with genii steered by Hrymer huge
Her terrific voyage :—But our path now draws
To the southern gate, swiftly speed ye on your road,
Valkyriar maidens await ye :—Gondula

And Rista, and Skogula, bear my pledge
To Odin my glorious father.—Lovelier
Than light, and joying as if the battle cry
Rung from heroic hosts, clad in bright arms
Each helmet effulgently gleaming, their proud crests
Dancing upon the sun-beams, the glad virgins,
Reined in their coal black steeds; alertly leaped
On other steeds, coal black, and breathing fire,
Strong as the whirlwind, as the lightning swift,
Ragnar's adventurous maids. Revenge re-awakened
Every vein filling, straining each vigorous nerve
On they dashed, none crying hold.—Furiously
Rolled on the roaring storm, chill-trembling men
Wondered and blessed themselves, and prayed the Gods
Protectors, and the entranced sorceress
Envied their falcon flight, so swift, so straight,
Sight, breathless lagged behind, paused but to pant
And they were lost. In her meridian
Fair Sunna lingered gazing, Skeenfaxi leaped
And shook his streaming mane, and strained his strength
Upon the tightning rein, then thundered on
As the pliant lash vexed his hard-panting sides
To atone for her delay.—Behind them left
Clouds, mountains, valleys, streams, rolled in confused
Eye-mocking indistinctness. At one huge bound
The key stone of wonderful Bifrost, arch sublime,
Was gained, and on they dashed. The Valkyries
Abased with each lance's point the hungry fires
Of it's red parapet, fires there defensively
Twined by the gods, all other to interdict

Than natures godlike : overawed they bowed
Submissive, and unscathed the maidens passed.—
Bifrost by gods, by mankind Rainbow named,
Spans o'er the gulph between Mannheim and Asaheim
Realm of high gods : three rings of colours blending
And interwoven yet lucidly distinct,
Form the all-overleaping arch, the topmost fire ;
Artfully built, so solid, so enduring,
Yet so intangible, has not nor ever will be
Another bridge contrived.—Loud neighing, heard
Gulltoppr the rush, and with his golden horn
Heimdaller sent from Himenborg the call
To battle, wondering, deeming that the day
Of decision had arrived. One moment reined
And the black steeds swept along :—Gondula pointed
And named the heavenly realms.—“Thrudvanger vast,
It's palace Bilskirner, through the curving halls
Roll the chained thunders muttering : Alfheim bright
Home of the luminous genii : Breidablik,
Harmonious, pure, it's mystic columns graven
With verses of power to raise the dead to life
Yet powerless their lost lord to recal.
Virtue and peace here live, and loveliest truth
Yet in the round of ages shall return
Never to quit such home : Glitner, it's pillars gold
It's roof of molten silver, Justice here
Enshrined lives : Sessvarna, Freya's hall
Magnificent and expansive to contain
United nations : Svartbecker, Saga's city,
Pent in by rocks and foaming cataracts

Where Odin loves to breathe the cooling air
And taste the cup of joy : Wild Noathuna
Snowy palace of Niorder, see, it's domes
Melt in the clouds : Fensaler, blest abode
Of heaven's Queen majestic, overlaid
With all that godlike genius could invent
And bid it live in gold : Vingolf, of love
And indestructible friendship, sacred hall
Of the bright goddesses, delightful, delicate,
Pleasure inspiring : In blissful ease reclined
Here the Asæ banquet, and the just hereafter
Shall wander in delight : Vast Gladheim rears
It's golden roofs, and spreads it's arches wide,
And sweeps it's halls, and winds it's passages
Over acres many and broad : Mansion of Joy,
Extensive, artful, grand, magnificent,
All other works sink into nought, overpowered
By the stupendous whole : within it ranged
Twelve golden thrones in splendour beaming bright
Long to sustain the gods ; Superior, one
In beauty and in magnitude, rejoices
When the All-Father here in judgment sits,
And gods dispense the laws which dwarfs obey.
Hard by to Gladheim, marvellous furnaces,
Anvils, forge-hammers, and moulds intricate,
Circle one darksome hall, wherein the gods
The perfect metal compose, whence the earliest age
The age of Gold was named, age pure, age blissful ;
Then the blithe gods, in sinless luxury
Merrily playing, threw the golden dice :

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Alas ! that Gullveiga demon of avarice,
With her twin sisters beauteous, dark of soul,
Should have polluted what was once so fair.
There Valgrind, in proportion lovely, raises
It's walls of diamond and all effluent gems,
Admitting and emitting gorgeous light ;
Few are there who it's massive bars can lift
Or thread the labyrinth of halls : here sleep
Chosen famed-diademed heroes, all outweighing
In worth, as others outweigh unnumbered hosts
Of fame-unnoticed men :—but here we halt
At Valascialf's open porch, none hence repelled
But the coward, the effeminate ; heroes here
Feast 'till the Day of Doom.'—The towers rare
Of burnished gold, the walls enchased with gold
Upon frosted silver, wondrously enwrought,
Glowed with adventures high ; and steeds, and men
Giants, and gods, in murderous combat mixed
As life had still impelled them. The arch above,
Frowned pendulous a wolf, as he would spring
Upon the unwary stranger, and he had sprung
Had aught ungracious entered : Upon the gates
Carven were eagles eager for the swoop,
Their keen eyes flashing, and with ravening rage
Every feather tremulous : Wide-spanned the roof
Was raftered with fractured spears, superbly wrought
With deeds heroic, each vocal with the fame
Of it's once possessor : Odin here enthroned
On highest Hlidschialf, terrific height,
Hence saw the nations, hence directed, swayed,

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And curbed rude Jotunheim, and Mannheim wide,
And bent the far Rymthussi:—Valhalla here
Spread it's vast breadth and stretched it's hazy length,
Where all had been darkness, had not golden shields
From the high roof poured down meteoric light,
And helms, and mail, and trophies, from the walls
Reflected and diffused the boon of gods
Instinctively as it was needed.—Day, in Asaheim
Had wheeled his ever reiterating round
And, from their jousting, shrined in glory rode
The heroic guards of heaven, household troops
On the battle field selected, and advanced
To honour and renown interminable. In poured
The invigorated hosts, and thunders louder
Than raging, foaming, plunging cataracts
Resounded as they trode.—Upon that day
Each worthiest prize had Ragnar carried off
And held, confessed of all his bold compeers,
Righteously his honours. Odin's worthy praise,
Of all the gods the praise, the acclamation
Of joyous goddesses, each beaming love
And admiration, filled the expansive hall,
And Echo to the winds wide spread his fame.
Yet Ragnar sighed, dark clouds of sadness dimmed
His capacious forehead, almost a trembling tear
Beneath his eyelid glittered; torturing death
Seemed yet his limbs to tear, and to impress
His smile of conscious pride with melancholy.
To whom the god who rules the powers of song :
“Mighty chief why drooping? stoutest heroes love

Upon thy steps to wait, the glorious virgins
Prompt to supply all else, more eagerly
Joy to attend on thee ; The festive board
High heaped with plenty, brimming o'er with mead
Invites keen appetite ; or rising far
Above material joys, seekest thou honours ?
Lo ! honour on thee pours redundantly
Her choicest glories : Shall her song ascend ?
What song shall follow where thou lead'st the lay ?
Shall thanks o'erflow from lips of eloquence ?
What fervid tongue could charm when thou wert mute ?"
To whom the mighty chief : " commendation, ill
Meets base requital, yet I still must grieve
That all such splendour has not yet removed
That sinking of the soul, all joy which dims :
I have not been avenged.—Sad withering thought,
I have not been avenged.—This heart beat high
In youthful manhood, Thora, beauteous Thora
Blessed these encircling arms, love in delight
Beneath my shield sat smiling ; my gallant ship
Breasted the boiling wave, my biting sword
Rang on the polished helm, my whistling spear
Drank the high-spouting blood, the iron hail
Struck through the golden corslets, standards, shields,
Rolled in the boiling flood, red carnage rioted
And the vexed ocean foamed one hideous wound ;
Yet I have not been avenged.—The gorgéd wolf
Howled o'er his plenteous feast, the screaming eagle
Glutted upon the slain, Did not the raven bury
His wings his feet in blood, and all the hosts

Of the blue cope of heaven wade and dabble
And wash themselves in blood? Still still am I,
Still am I unavenged.—Eyra-sund,
And Austr-vigr, Gautland, Helsingia,
Ifa and Bornholm, Uller Akri and Vender-land
Yet trembling at my name point out my shade
And cry, he is unavenged.—The Norseland girls
Clapped hands at my slender bark; the Norseland girls
Writhing and twisting shrieking in their bonds
Learnt the sea-rover's might.—Scarpöë and Indoröë
Smeared with their children's gore, held up their arms
And begged me to forbear: Still still am I
Still am I unavenged.—The gorgeous sun
Smiled as our swift swords hewed, and javelins
Chaunted a Mass to Hilda: Waltheof young,
And proud, and daring, saw the morning sun,
The moon saw him in his pale stiffness dead
And in his pity wept, but we laughed loud
And emptied the Braga-bowl: Joy, bridal joy,
Rich as the blest bride's sweet and yielding kiss,
Glad as the dalliant widow's merry laugh,
When the vigorous warrior cheers her loneliness
And thrones her in his honour, danced with us
And gloried in our sport:—The shaven crowns
Rang beneath our hail storm at lone Lindisfarne,
Orcnöë and Ebudöë, and Sudreyar,
Iernöë and Aungulsöë, rolled in their blood,
Heard the strong tempest shake his iron wings
And shrank, and screamed, and fled: Yet still, yet still,
Still am I unavenged.—The virgins shrieked,

The blue steel smote, the golden mail and helm
Cracked, shivered, splintered, fell, and groaning souls
Twisted out through wide-gashed wounds : yet Valland cries
Ragnar is unavenged, although her plains
And all her rolling rivers, swollen with blood,
Trembled, and cowering mothers hushed their babes
Into silence with my name.—Who filled these seats
With honoured heroes, foemen though they were
Now brothers all and friends ?—My glorious sons
Gaunt wolves of slaughter, emulating eagles,
To herry down, and swoop, and spread the hills
With the crimson banquet, trode but at my heels ;
Agnar and Rogvaldur here sit to attest
Their bolder father's teaching ; yet am I,
Yet am I unavenged.—Wearied, and beaten down,
And hissing like rattling pebbles on the beach
The fiery wave had wrecked us : Did we stay
To parley with the danger ? On we strode
Strong in ourselves, and dauntless. Ella's fate,
Not Ella's courage, Ragnar's fate o'erpowered,
And the cruel coward, in his malignity
Gave me to the vipers, even from my shoulders tearing
Aslauga's pledge of love. Did the murderer dread
That love could fondly shield me ?—Ragnar laughed,
And scorned, and mocked, and sang exultingly
His death song to the hissing auditory,
And motionless, and with unvarying pulse
Felt them, through every sinew gnaw and gnaw
And his substance suck and suck. Still those wounds bleed
And the black, clotting venom, yet courses on,

For I am unavenged.—The adder's tongue
Yet searches through my heart, there, there he coils,
Even there he cannot die, and will not die ;
And all this glory, all honoured epithets,
And every shout, and every blandishment,
Palls on my sickening soul :—All, all with tongues
Loud as ten thousand thunders yet cry out
Ragnar is unavenged.—O hear my cry !
By thy tremendous name, O Omi hear !
Grant grant me my revenge.”—The dreadful god,
Sire of gods of men, thus heard well pleased,
And well pleased, to the assenting murmur listened
Of the gods his sons, and all the heroic host.—
“ Not unexpected, from the first foreseen
Well pleased thy prayer is heard, and the dear honour
Of all his heroes has not in heroic breast
More anxious guardian than in Odin's heart.
Foreseen, thus granted, 'ere thy soul had prompted
Such utterance :—Thine are ennobled sons
Thy daughters alike ennobled.”—One hurrah,
And spears on shields and swords on targets rang
In acclamative volleys. Gazing, surprise
And unresolved astonishment the chief
Alone held mute, until through his gushing eyes
Tears forced their way ; he could not to his bosom
Clasp his own children.—Erect and fearlessly
Dauntless the maidens trod, their eyes sublime
Worshipped, but quailed not : as Rulers of Destiny
They stood, as not to ask for but command ;
As the beaucous Nornie when they fix the fates

Of nations and of realms, safe in their loveliness
Or with gods or demons.—Swiftly preventing speech
Bounding, the Valkyries on coal black steeds,
Glittering in burnished arms, in honour meet
Preceded, guarded, Hrafn :—Far away streamed
The mysterious standard famed, fixed fate the warp,
And the red woof fixed fate :—The ensanguined field
Fresh with the blood of heroes, never glowed
In such lovely lustre : Glory and Revenge
In living imagery depicted, shone
Upon silver wrought in gold ; the bullioned hem
Was of locks of heroes with gold intertwined ;
Inlaid the staff with gold, in mystic Runes
Spoke with stern imprecations, threats, defiance,
Stamped deep and ratified ; the oath of Fate
Were not so sure.—But every wonder sunk
Into dross and refuse, when all eyes beheld
The sacred bird in new-born vigour float,
And spread her sounding wings, and soar, and stoop
As the fierce battle cry discordant rose.—
Mysterious power, prescient as the gods,
Far she foresees and 'ere the thronged hosts close
Knows the result, and stretching, flaps aloud
Her exulting pinions, or dejected droops
Still, lifeless, fixed, immovable and sad,
As foul defeat or impetuous victory
Shall follow or shall flee.—Heroes were hushed,
And mute attention as a statue stood
Listening for fairy music ; when arose
The king of Gods and men, in majesty

As an o'ertowering mountain girded by hills
And undulating plains.—He spoke, and sounds
Rich in exuberant fulness charmed all space,
And veneration worshipped at his gaze.—
“Princes, and heroes, and ethereal gods,
Time-honoured time-renowned; Vengeance has cried
For holiest vengeance, and ensanctified
By it's own righteous retribution, shall,
Feast to satiety: fire, rapine, blood,
Shall course unchecked throughout that reeking land,
Reeking with heroic blood. Had that blood fallen
As warrior blood should have fallen, in fair field,
Not Odin had decreed nor had gods ratified
Revenge, but their wrath was cruel:—Cruelty
Shall in red wrath pour down.—Their brother's blood
In cowardly malignity was shed,
Now shall their richest blood in torrents course
Though heaven fell down to plead; Our will is fate.
Bear ye to lower earth, much enduring maids,
The Gift of Gods, bid each heroic son
Be strong, do valiantly.”—Dark, dark, all dark,
The vestal-fire extinguished, Silence chill
Sole monarch of the temple, wonderingly
In silence sat the virgins; all were awed
Yet dauntless.—Whether in reality
Or in ecstatic vision had they passed
And heard and seen, neither questioned:—Sacred Hrafn
Glowed in the morning sun.—Or their own labour
Or the free gift of the god; honouring the god
The elated raven flew in vigorous strength

For the field of slaughter eager.—Awed they were firm,
Reverent they were dauntless, and erect and proud
Aloft bare the Standard.—Silently they moved
Significantly silent.—Warriors had watched,
Grey headed age, and puling infancy,
Matrons, and anxious virgins, had so watched
Through the lone night ; nor chilling dew, nor darkness,
Impenetrable darkness, nor hunger, nor thirst,
Had broken down one spirit, nor had one
Craved for the morning, nor in the morning's gleam
Had one e'er moved.—Warriors had in dismay
Trembled with reverence ; warriors in delight
Leaped high with exultation.—Wondrous Hrafn
Flaunted in the joyous breeze, ferocious Hrafn
Streamed to their acclamation, dauntless Hrafn
Was prayed to, was adored.—The infant trod
With manhood's firmness, men as giants stalked,
Chieftains as gods ; The very dust was proud,
And rocks, and woods, fountains, and lakes, rolled on
Denamearc's defiance.—Hrafn flew on high,
And every unfledged stripling was at once
Daring, enduring, was invincible.

A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X .

BOOK THE SECOND.

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E S E C O N D .

Odun, Earl of Domnania, prepares to repel Hubba ; who, in a Ship-Council, decides upon attacking the Saxons. They, after severe resistance, retreat into their fortress.

Fitfully had slept Domnania's noble Earl :
Heavily the surges breaking, the wild winds
Moaning as in anguish, well had rocked his rest,
And yet he slept not. Loud the labouring gust
Laden with ominous portents, sounded, as if voice
Were given to all nature, and that strife
Of superhuman warriors rode on the rack
And howled within the scud. By mortal eyes
Unseen, an angel host serenely camped
Under Abdiel ; who had held fëalty, when all

His compeers had broken their faith, and mad turmoil
Defiled even heaven. Fiercely trooping, on the storm
And on the ocean wave, the demon host
Urged along the pirate fleet.—Stern though the war
Of the conflicting elements, still steadily holds
Hubba his course right on ; and every wind,
And every wave, and every current, bent
By them to this only object, force his fleet
As in a destined track.—His heavy charge
Even the last hope of Wessex, ever possesses
His generous valorous heart : Alfred is lost,
Yet Wessex is not lost, for Odun lives,
And, pent within his humble citadel,
Weak for defence, and small for all it holds,
Thegns and retainers, here in languid hope
With the wide sea before them, look but to flee,
If forced to flee, and at the worst to sink
In the vast waste of waters : he resolves
Life to sell dearly, life held in trust to serve
Liegeman to Wessex, liegeman to his king.—

His keen eye through the deep gloom sees, still sees
One solitary star, dim star it seems
Unwavering yet increasing, brightening still,
And brightening ever, as the weary hours
Delay the Car of Day.—Intently watches
Thorkil, whose daring valour oft had led
To victory Alfred's fleet, now glad to share
With Odun the desperate danger. Skilled to judge,
Answers he pondering ; “ No beacon light
Grows with such increase, or, were it beacon light

'Ere now from Duncerig answering light had striven
To bear up against the tempest:—Yet the warm
Red flush of awakening morning pales the fire
Be it what e'er it may." And Odun thus,
" Mark you those cressets, as if the welcome sun
Or tipped the clouds with splendour, or some city's
Every turret blazed with gold? Bold seamēn, mark,
They scatter, now they close; bestir we must
Or bitterer storm will crash. Sound the alarm,
Kynvit must up and arm".—The gathering note
Carols right cheerily, and Kynvit, armed,
Joys in the hardy host which mans her walls.—
Thorkill, with active footstep seeks the fleet;
Soundly the wearied mariners had slept
To the rough waves rocking, and as lightly wake
At his well known hearty call: " Ceolmund be swift,
Strike every-tent cloth, lower each burthened yard,
And tightly stow them." Prompt his arm to guide
Steadily the helm, to pull the ponderous oar,
To course along them as they evenly swept,
To watch and con the glorious fires of heaven,
To breast the rolling tide and make his port,
To wing the feathered bolt, or home to launch
The war-delighting spear, skilfully to rein
The fiery steed, and soothe his courage down
To an infant's playfulness, he promptly flies;
And every seaman-warrior, each apt to lead
As to obey, each fit to be a king,
As promptly ply their task.—Laden with rough,
Mis-shapen masses, every arm wide filled

With hand-stones for far fight, as those for close
Heroic combat ; every ample hold
With missiles deep is stored, with lances heaped ;
And heavy spears, and lighter javelins
And fleet winged shafts, and bows, and shields that glow
Each a mimic sun, by agile mariners piled
Fill the fore-castles where the emulous,
And hotter spirits take their determined stand,
To justify former honours, or to gain
Title to admiration. Hither leap
Thorkill and Ceolmund, Wulfstan, Ottar the brave,
Each alike skilled the daring keel to guide
To far Beormaland, where the summer sun
Around the Pole wheeling scarcely cools her steeds.
Aslac and Ceolred, who from stout Porta drew
His lineage, and for fame not gain strove hard
That lineage to exalt. Well the chief knew
The value of high lineage, cherished, loved,
And honoured it in all, and had he not
Lineage to boast had made himself the head
Of his own house, that a distant race might boast
And in his glory glory. Each his ship prizes
As a bridegroom his true maiden, and treads proudly
Upon the conspicuous height. Nor there alone
Stand they ; to Thorkillequal in manly stature,
Odun in mailed coat and beaming helm,
More than his comrade graceful, feels the gaze
Of every eye upon him. Not one eye
Ever drew back in sadness, but rejoiced
Ever and ever to gaze upon and love

The generous warrior.—At trumpet sound
Each ready blade dips deep in the flashing wave,
And along the gay barks bound, as though the spirit
Of each bold chieftain were the gay bark's soul.
Swiftly they fly ; dark Torridge in her fleetness
Far lags behind their helmsmen, whose adeptness
Holds them in as well trained coursers, and in one
Taut-strained line, midway in the narrow strait
Stays their rapid course. Shipped are the ready oars,
And, in due order ranged, tightly the stems
Are each to other lashed, and so compacted
The glittering sterns, an ample field they form
For the kingly strife, and upon either board
Pinnaces, keels, all that can swim or float,
Though for fight unapt, well stowed with warlike stores
From shore to shore fill up the interval ;
And steadily they wait.—A griesly bear
Watching for prey, is unawares close met
By a startled hunter ; so into no infant's clasp
Fall the Pirate Kings. Swiftly bearing o'er the strait,
Borne on by cruelty, impelled by thirst
For satiateless revenge, on have they held
Fearless their track. Nor their insatiate thirst,
Nor impetuous tempest, nor wide-swirling wave,
Nor all the energy of all their gods
Their foul desire shall feed : the angelic host
Has frowned upon them, and an invisible arm
Their furious heat restrains.—And the storm has fled,
And the far-beaming courser shakes his mane
Over the brilliant sky. Day has arisen

In splendour from his wintry couch, and wide
Thrown open heaven's portals. And the king curses
The officious day for his brightness, yet stays not :
Headlong and huge The Dragon ploughs her way
Like the fabled monster, fearless of all on earth.
Her wide wing far outspread, brilliantly white
And striped with glowing red, strains even to snapping
The black the taper mast, the black stays groan
And creak beneath the tug, and, stretched afar,
Even and frequent the energetic sweeps
The foaming waters cleave. Sun-glancing shields,
White scales and red, her lengthened sides adorn,
High from her waist the poised head arching shines
Effulgent with burnished gold, and o'er the helm
Barbed the golden tail as fiercely gleams.
Onward she bears, as will had winged her on,
A living, flying, threatening dragon, armed
The shuddering world to spoil. Keen spears, blue helms,
Spread lightnings, on her frowning prow leap high
The furious bersærker, leap, bite their shields
And rave, and howl, and gnaw their sinewy arms,
And suck their own mad blood : and the grim king,
As Hrymer steering from the blazing realm
To desolate earth, rend heaven, proudly glancing
Over his strong armament exulting cries,
Though vast Duncerig flings back the boastful scorn,
" Now perish Wessex ! Ragnar to thy fame
I devote her, my brave father ! Blood for blood
Has flowed and shall flow, until her hated name
Shall be from the earth swept off. Hrafn has dipped

The black beak in her blood : Ella's eagle wings
From his own roof-tree quivered, Edmund coiled
As a hedge-hog feathered, Bardenöe's and Croylands monks
And Elöe's nuns desparingly have shrieked to
Our joyous cry of vengeance ; Vengeance has waded
Knee-deep in slaughter, yet the thirst unquenched
Burns in our bosoms, as the poisonous snake
Gnawed on thy heart, my father ! Hrafn, speed
Speed, speed thy flight direct" !—Marks not the king,
Hrafn still floats right gaily in his sight,
But darklyⁱⁿ are the glances, deep the groans
Of every black bark's crew. The breeze is strong,
The brisk wind sports with the thin-foaming spray
Filling the air with brine, but Hrafn hangs
Unmoved, or with an idle flapping, sways
As a peasant's trophy to the barn-door nailed.
Gazing they gaze, and in each other's eyes
Perils foreboding read.—The rock-bound coast
Seems not the coast they seek, on the eastern shore
No mistakeable omens frown ; the stag has risen
And stands at bay, the lion from his lair
Glares awaiting the hunter, the enormous bear
Opens wide his nervous arms ; dare him they must
Or flee, and Hubba never yet has fled
Yet pauses now ; and, as her pilot pauses,
So pauses The Dragon :—Patriotism there
Has taken her determined stand.—Dazed by her glance
They feel yet not own a terror, so Virtue shines
In her own beauty effulgent, and bleared Vice
Pays homage perforce. Throned on the air sits high

The God of Slaughter ; beauty's Goddess bright,
Freya the lovely, she who binds in golden
And silken fetters, she who claims the half
Of all War's banquet, and with Odin shares
Valhalla's heroes : Tyr god of battle, Tyr
Guard of the brave, the bold, the intrepid god,
Prudent, sagacious, skilful to draw out
The embattled host, and apportion victory :
Heimdaller, God of air, no goddess bore
The wondrous child, who from nine virgins claimed
His origin, and of each mother held
Her supremest attribute. Fair as opening morn,
Rich in all graces, skilled each flower to cull
Of marvellous power, in each liberal art
Skilled, in all knowledge human or divine,
Of every milder virtue wholly filled
Great is their knowledge, high their enchanting song :
Guardian of men, of giants, and of gods,
He of such mothers sprung, and had each sense
Of sight, of hearing, wondrous as his birth
Ever active and ever vigilant : Next to him sits
Niorder of Vanaheim, adopted god,
Who rules the boiling wave, hurls the white foam
Amid commingling clouds, or bids it, hushed
As a tired infant, spread it's molten mirror
Wherein heaven shall admire her beauty : Bileister,
Ruler of the storm, which from the sounding wings
Of vast Hræsvelger pours, who in the North
At the freezing limit of creation sits
On ice-capped rocks enthroned, an eagle huge

Swaying loud tempest, maddened hurricane,
Tornado, and whirlwind: Hilda, Goddess stern
Of discord, of war, and rapturously she exults
In the harsh battle-cry, snaps swords, cleaves helms,
Sporting in that mad whirlwind: Gudur, Rosta,
Odin's chosen Valkyries, and Skullda dark
Inexorable Goddess, whom nor tears
Nor prayers can move, who with her sisters spans
Every man's existence, makes him what he is
And must be. (So enwoven the demons have
Their own arts with man's frailty, and such names
Have adopted, and such attributes and forms
As priest and poet jugglery have framed;
Gods of Rome, Greece, Egypt, India or Scania,
Reckless or what, or where, or how, or when
Reverenced or named, so that man's soul enslaved
By it's own cherished lust should God displease,
Whose name they tremble at, revile, abhor.)
Now in presumption here sit they supreme,
Deeming themselves high Gods, fondly beguiling
Themselves into uttermost ruin, yet to come.
Hubba their favourite, for Inguar fallen
His brother has left in undisputed rank,
First in all foulness, vileness, cruelty.
They from their height of height look down and scan
The opposing forces. Odin, uptowering
Dilated in his gladness, swiftly ensheaths
His strong-knit form in arms; bearing aloft
His spears, two mountain pines, he treads sublime
Waving his plumed crest. Two ravening wolves

Trembling and ready to spring, with hungry jaws
There gape, and huge serpents coiling around his shield,
Wrought with the giant strifes of gods and men,
Destruction threat. Eagerly his battle steed
Snorts livid fire, and paws the labouring air
For the fray impatient; horrid strife would be
Again in heaven, no pigmy strife, so sung
By fabling scalds, but strife to annihilate
The firm-set Earth, to consume the elements,
To emblaze Creation, did not Abdiel
Check the demon spirits, for they all have armed
Their limbs with glittering steel, or brass, or gold,
And in their madness would unpityingly
All life embroil. Revealing, for blest spirits
By demons are imperceptible, save as they choose
To veil or display their splendour, Abdiel
The film of sin removes. Lo! chariots armed,
Horses of fire, angel warriors,
Each as pure diamond, sapphire, or chrysolite,
Effulgent gleam. Far back those shrink amazed,
As with attempered sternness thus he speaks.
“Baal, Moloch, Mars, Odin, whichsoever name
Fallen spirit thou mayest delight in, hear thou this,
And hearing obey! When men prostrate themselves,
Bowing down reverent to stocks and stones,
To kings, to benefactors, to heroes, or saints,
They are their own deluders, and though the dread,
The only God, may, when they seek in truth
And single-heartedness, that sin forgive,
That will be of his own beneficence. Whate’er is right

God will do, and thou knowest it: rejected
And driven forth of the fair field of Heaven,
For it had not been good even for yourselves
To be aliens in glad place, ye have their choice:
Ye they adore, they trust, such fragile reed
Can but break in their hands and pierce them through.
If to such evil counsellors they seek
Evil must grow of the teaching. In high spirit
Oft ask they a fair field, be the field fair.
The lists are wanded off, in hostile arms
Seek not to break that fence. As angels may
Counsel in danger, so may ye suggest
Beyond ye move not".—Abashed, yet muttering
Draw back the fiends, and straight, their arms dissolved
In mist disperse.—Revealed in repulsiveness
To angel eyes, by man still fondly decked
With heroic bearing or beauty, as either sex
Is attributed or assumed, watch they suspense
The arbitrement of arms, between endurance
And furious onslaught; know they that the wand
Of Abdiel had driven them howling home
Did they one moment demur.—Resounding loud,
Throughout the fleet echoing from bark to bark,
To Ship-Council the mellow horn summons. King with King
Stand around The King, and every free-man holds
In conference his station, none exempt
But the coward, the disgraced, and none, so ranked,
Soil the bold Sea-Kings' force. Hubba thus speaks,
"Free men, and gallant Sea-Kings! in this strait
Stand we and ask advice. By stress driven here

Eastward of our due course towards the obscure haven
Whence leads an ancient road into Wessex realm,
There with our brother Kings in strength to war :
Enemies unlooked for, us the gods have led
Here to discover : Say shall we destroy
These snarling curs, as the gods seem to bid,
Or in contempt pass by and hold our voyage" ?
The king of The Black Bison Godefrid,
He from low Venderland his force equipped
Two war-ships agile and strong, by himself one
Commanded, and The Wolf by Sigefrid,
Speaks out at once. " The Gods may do, Sir King !
As the Gods please, but when the wounds fall thick
Will the Gods stand up and take them ? We to ourselves
Are gods, and gods enough for our true selves :
Than my good sword and shield, one to defend
The other to avenge, I know no god
And none need I. Of my own aid secure
None other yet have I sought. If they attack
No choice have we, and doubtless shall return
Hard blows for hard blows many and vigorous,
But if they rest we can well leave them here".
Forward steps Hialto ; he, by a concubine,
Son of King Harald whose usurpation drove
Ragnar to dare his fortune on the wave
Bereft of his king-ryke : " My staid counsel, King !
Is to amend our course, nor idly waste
Time now so precious in unsought for strife.
This port is not our haven, why then take
A risk we need not, when by holding on

And conquering the greater, this the less
Needs must submit"? To whom the fiery King,
"Cousin, dost thou, thou who hast ever lapped
Blood from infancy thus counsel? Shame, shame,
Shame on thy brow be written! Bright Hilda's sport
Crosses our track unaware, shall we not dance
When the goddess gives us music"? "True, dread King!
Yet have we seen a mastiff before a rat
Pause and consider. None but most desperate men,
Men that stake all their fortune on one die,
Men bent to sell life at it's extremest price,
Thus threaten, thus abide their threatening. Did not I
Rank next unto thee, Sir King! who standest not next
To any but the God of Victory,
I had bitten off my tongue, or ever these words
Of common prudence had sounded. Speak he who may
Hialto speaks no more.—That is his counsel."—
And the rebuked sleuth-hound takes his rank and chafes.—
Graceful in speech, and eloquent in look,
As aspect and speech had taken each others office
Steps forth Hornklofi:—Premature manhood scanty
Shades his red cheek, over his shoulders cluster
Many a maid-envied lock, flashing like gold
Girting an ivory stem:—His clear blue eye
Sleeps in serenity, in love languishes,
Or vivid lightnings darts;—The impetuous soul
Undisguised there shines;—With a child's modesty
Utters he an old man's wisdom. "Before matured age
Matured experience, and assured daring,
Which strikes not until the foe must surely fall,

Youth should be silent ; but, counsel asked of all
Duty enforces speech. Let us affect
Irresolution, seem anxious to avoid
The encounter, let our ships of burthen lag
As unequal to swift flight ; Saxon men are stout
And stand as walls compact, but they are hot
And prompt upon pursuit ;—Lure them to break
Their order, induce them to scatter in attack,
Singly they perish where combined they triumph.”
Approving murmurs rise as he blushingly
Steps back and breathes deep for relief. None else
Speak, although many turn an enquiring eye
Longing to ask counsel of Hrafn, heavily
Hanging in orderly folds : when thus the king
Gives his decision. “ Many be our thanks
For this clear counsel. Well have I weighed each king’s
Frank speaking, and as frankly thus speak I,
Why should concealment lurk when free-men speak ?
True this is not our port, that I concede,
And but the storm our course had hither warped
This fleet we had not seen ; but we have seen it,
That is enough to convict us, and our backs
Will wince beneath the lash should warriors say,
We excused our eyes from their office. Not so, lads !
Every Danish girl shall laugh on our return
And bear her head up higher as she holds
Nine Saxon girls in thrall. Gold and rich silk
Into their laps shall pour, highly burnished helms
On our brows shall glitter, noble bulls and stallions
To the high gods shall steam, and wide Valhalla

Stretch her vast gates the thronging crowds to grasp
Hewn by our good brown swords : black Niflheim
Shall surfeit upon the shrieking, coward slaves
Who shall beg and be slaughtered begging. On lads, on ! ”—
Avarice, swift revenge, and reckless hate
Fly through the fleet, inciting, urging, luring,
And one wild hurrah, breaks The Council up.—

Down run the flagging sails, yards, oars are stowed,
Readily ranked each warrior bears erect
His tough, stout, ashen spear ; sharp pikes, keen javelins
Glitter, and bow strings twang, as the skilful ear
Listens to the gladdening music. Awakened, Hrafn,
Poised down by leaden foreboding, yet once more
Streams on the surging outcries.—Six stout barks
Hold all the hearts of Wessex, hearts that beat
Sternly and dauntlessly.—To them opposed
Seven of superior bulk, lashed by the stem
And by the stern, so as in the encounter they
Shall plunge into each interval, interlocking
As the sharp-serried shark’s teeth. Space enough
On either board is left, and the eager sweeps
Flutter, as nestlings flutter for their food,
’Ere within reach ; these to overbear and sink,
The rest are freely left each pass to force
Between the near shore and the hostile fleet,
And board by waist or stern. Instantaneously
The wide conception rose as if well devised,
Considered, matured, weighed o’er, and o’er, and o’er :
Hubba’s the honour, Odin’s the parentage.
He, crafty god, as Klofe Solvesson disguised

(Solve of Niardöe held the unstable realm)
Had to the ear the perfected scheme suggested,
Urged it to the impetuous heart, the heated brain
Prompt of conception grasped it, every hand
As promptly gives it life. And now each fate
Hangs in the trembling balance.—Steadily
The Saxons wait, nor impatient hand is stirred,
Nor is word uttered ; reverently they pray
And secretly to God, and God is pleased
Each arm, each heart to nerve.—As warps sublime
In chill, in terrific threatening, a cloud
Black with the tempest burthened ; as a lovely
Ocean girdled islet sits in it's confidence,
So waits resolved Odun, so the Pirate King
Sweeps on majestically, unfathomed depths
Beneath his shadow shuddering. Useless the helm,
Erect in dauntlessness the rover bold
Stands on the prow, as Thor high towering
Over a shrinking giant. 'Ere the space
Has to a spear's-cast diminished, his keen eye
Seeing Thorkill, loud he cries, " Art thou then here
Who hast already felt my strength ? lie down and lick
My feet, and beg thy life". " Thy feet to lick
Would call for a long tongue, and a strong heart
To bid that tongue obey. The Saxon girls
Laugh at thy wolf-skin cloak, fit cloak to screen
The valiant king who begs a Lapland witch
From the iron hail to wrap him." The rough taunt
Calling the king, he shouts, " That braggart blood
Yelling the wolf shall lap, and eagles strive

Over thy carcase ; Odin, take thy prey".
Rapidly flies the lance, no lance had ever
Flown such swift flight, yet short of the destined mark
It falls in the waves and snaps. "Glad omen, King !
Merrily laugh the sea-maids at thy skill".—
Fiercely the Bersærker leap their maddening dance,
Shout, gnaw their shields, and foam, and shriek, and howl,
And in derision sneer. Thorkill yet stands,
Sneer ne'er provoked nor fear had ever urged
Him ever to strike until he could strike home,
Ready, not rash to hurl. Strains Hubba hard
The labouring entrail, and the hard-drawn bow
Creaks almost to snapping. Tatea, Thorkill's friend ;
Tatea the Finlander, who had his fortune cast
Along with Thorkill the Norseman, with a falcon's glance
And a roe's agility, wings from his bow
The fiery-feathered barb : over the King's
Extended hand it strikes : lengthwise the bow
Splits like a baby's toy. "So is life rent
Mad King, from thee, or Finnamearc soothsayers
Are children in their craft : " exulting cries ;
The arrow-king. "That girl threads featly
Her needle" laughs the King, concealing well
In sport his red wrath, though yet inwardly
Accursing the mischance. Reckoning skilfully
The decreasing distance, and for a moment poising,
Onward the vengeful lightning Thorkill launches,
And, but the practised warriors saw the spear
'Ere it had left his nervous grasp, and formed
Rapidly a shield-fence, Hubba thy soul had flown

With fore-tidings of the fight. Boring, not shattering,
The compacted barrier, on it idly sings
Yet pierces the trembling mast; and, quivering sways
In it's dissatisfied energy: Aloud
Shouts the vexed seaman, "Thy red fire once wrapped
In peace time my father's home, thy treachery
This once has doom escaped, the next fair blow
Shall fall with unerring certainty; abhorred
Detested and despised, thou who degradest
The name of King, soiling it in the dust
Of foul dishonour, in this fight, thou or I
Shall tightly shake hands with death". Hubba, advised,
Retires the mast beyond, conspicuously
Yet on high directing all. Thorkill's fierce rage
Pauses, reflects, grows calm.—Good cause had he
For unremitting rage, all of whose race
Had by that cruel monster's thirst for slaughter,
Slaughter for it's own sake, been precipitately
Swept from the earth. Alone the friendless boy
Breasted the wave, alone his fortune braved,
Save with Tatea, who in his wandering skiff
Saved him, and loved him. Under Alfred both
Service had taken, when his capacious mind
Conceived, and his pertinacious industry
Breaking down obstacles, inspiriting
All with his own brave spirit, from the woods
Called up a naval force, and up it rose
As a brazen wall in strength. In the sad wreck
Of his ardent hope, to their adopted land
True and unswerving, they with him will sink,

If that the Might of Heaven so decree,
And here will seal their faith.—In wild sport Tatea
Draws his lithe brow : the bark to it's errand true
Cleaves the yet quivering shaft ; and, dropping, falls
At Hubba's foot. “ The Finland girl has sent thee
A sample of her craft, now guard thy head,”
And with such vengeful might another flies,
That had not Skullda breathed it from it's mark
The warm brain had seethed with it's ferocious heat.
Erring it flies, but in brave anger bends
The nose-plate, and, falling pierces his armed foot,
And as he writhes, laughs the skilful Finlander.
“ It will be a token to Valhalla, King !
Valkyries shall entitle thee the limping knight.”
Then turns in scorn.—And now the Saxon fleet
Pours in the crashing hail, and stinging rain ;
Ceolmund and Ceolred upon either board
The attack direct ; prone down fragmental rocks
Drop on the oarsmen, staggering and wavering
Their long sweeps in the dark waves float, as down
The sturdy mariners fall. Forcefully the pagans
Launch their rough missiles ; the encountering storms
War in the clouds, casting a fearful shade
Over the opposing hosts.—In it's speed checked
The thunder cloud warps on, heavily bearing
Upon the Saxon craft. The rounding bows
Creak yet hold firmly : both fleets by the shock repelled
Shake through their wide extent, then settling, close
As nerve-knit wrestlers.—Who first of martial note
Falls in the deadly international strife

Sing thou, my Muse! for it is Freedom's fight.—
Godefrid in vengeance, from the Bison's prow
Looks upon the Saxon fleet and thundering
Cries in his fierceness: "God, nor man, nor priest,
Now save ye Saxons, to my own glad fame
I devote this twentieth trophy." Strongly he flings
His whirling spear, aimed straight at Odun's throat.
Meaning above the ringed mail to strike
And open death's gate between the collar-bones;
Swiftly the stout shield, high uplifted, throws
From it's course the weapon, and intrepidly
The Earl's strong broad spear flies. Open, the mouth
Receives it, and cloven the tongue, black spouting blood
Is vomited o'er the shaft. Out the soul winds
Her way from the heavy carcase. Down that falls
Into the loathing hold, straight to be hurled
Into the disgusted wave. Revenge impelled,
Sigefrid leaps forward. Plunging, as he leaps
Ceolmund's keen lance through the unprotected flank
Pierces, and coursing downward, to the deck
Pins him. Adroitly his sharp curtle-axe
Chops through the shaft—Released, erect he stands
The spear head quivering in his outrushing blood,
And, though fainting, his ashen spear launches; driving on
Through the round buckler truly in the centre
It bores; spirts the red blood, but the flesh alone
Of Ceolmund's arm bears wound. Sigefrid falls
Dying yet vindictive, wide over him the shields
Warding off the storm. Tatea's burning barbs
Thick fly; none harmless fly, every keen shaft

Writes a warrior's name in blood. Thorolf the first,
Then Kolberd, then Henric, seaman bold and skilled,
And deadly vi-king, oft the wolves he fed
Slaughtering, and now luxurious fishes feed
Richly upon him. Plunder pursuing for
Mere thirst of plunder, Uffo had amassed
Red gold, and polished silver, gaily wrought
Embroidered vests, for regal damsels fit
Or to hang regal chambers:—Through his craving,
Insatiable bowels sharply the arrow
Stings like an adder, and no more he craves.—
Boarded the Bison, Thorkill saw the gap
And into her waist with his stout bill-men sped,
Launched, the piled lances, meant for Saxon hearts,
In Danish blood rejoice: Hubba the danger
Instinctively sees, he strikes, he threatens, he urges,
And his bold crew leads on. Close is the fight,
Fierce is the slaughter, hundreds there fall down
Unknown, unrecorded, until the capacious hold
Deep in gore swims, and the ensanguined sea
Rolls crimson. Tramps along the slaughtering King
His fearful course; as sternly Thorkill treads
His murderous path; Christians and Pagans fall
By either warrior, as autumnal fruits
By the blast shaken. Closed upon in their wake
By their hardy followers, each is nearer urged,
Each for one strong decisive blow high aims
Full at the adverse head his deadly blade,—
A shrill a shuddering cry above the din
Shrieks—the foul conflict ceases—reeling the ship

Beneath her confused freight wavers—Coolmund
Having hewn the lashings asunder, huge the bulk
Heels to her beams, rolls over, into the flood pours
Victors and vanquished, wounded, dying, dead,
And living thickly entangled. Swimming, floating,
Fainting, or sinking, o'er the sickening mass
Even slaughter confounded stares,—the clamorous fight
On either side stands hushed—His shirt of mail
Stripping off, Odun, at the drowning men
Grasps, they are men not foes in such distress,
And a loud cheer rises on the wondering air,
Air never used the joyous shout to hear
Of mercy from such tongues. Thorkill the rude
Unpolished seaman weeps. Hard toil and war
Have scarred, have stiffened his form; rough as the storm
He joys in, yet his warm heart no bound knows
To love or hate, and now he loves to weep.
Yet short the pause—off is The Bison cast
A plaything for the waves, and Hubba blows
Again the blast of war.—Fierce, fiercer yet
From the short breathing, rave the furious onset,
The clang, the clash, the jar, the shout, the yell,
The shriek, the groan, the heavy, the hollow plash
Into the yawning depth. So close the fight
Around each fearless prow, none can discern
Aught beyond his opposite foe. Earl Odun plunges
His polished javelin through the merciless
The audacious Bersærker, who, naked of mail
Rushed amid lances, grasped at swords, tore off
And hurled away bucklers, and unharmed had yet

Traversed each ship in his madness :—Now he gripes
And wrestles with his death, clings to the shaft
Struggles, and forces himself forward to catch hold
Of Odun by the throat, as a strong boar
Impelled by his terrible energy bears on
And through himself drives the blade so that he may
But rend the hunter's thigh. Young Oslac swiftly
Cleaves through his boiling brain, yet, grappling tightly
Even in death, the hands must be cloven off
'Ere the chief can be released.—Stealing between
The mainland and the fleets, warily holds
The Snake her winding course, wide scattering
Pinnaces, coracles, keels, yet not unscathed ;
Stones, darts, and spears, and pikes, and axes sharp,
Hack many a limb, and beat in many a skull,
Through many a body pour light. Once fairly in,
On to the Saxon she grapples, and round swinging,
By the tide swayed, alongside crashes close
And lashing fast, boards along the extreme length
Of fiery Thorkill's craft. High his shout rises
“ God and King Alfred ” ! and the pirates hang,
Backward in terror ; for a moment hang,
But in impatient fury onward to dash
Led by impetuous Hagbard. Young, brave, prodigal
Of life, or wealth, he held no plundered store
But frankly gave up all, and where the heat
Of danger blazed, there there was Hagbard seen
As war personified. As a child lightsome,
And as a maiden gentle when at rest,
Now he heads on his men, nor hang they back ;

Oslac and Ceolred turn ; close in the foe,
Upon both he rushes, in either hand a lance,
Behind, his long shield slung. Parting, they trip
The unheeding Sea King, into the deep hold
Head down, he still clings tight, and shortening
His lance to the head, stabs at his adversary.
Thicker, still thicker, the thick onset grows,
Christians and Pagans as one immingled mass
Twining in convulsion. Sharply bending, Oslac
To strike, is withholden by Odun : “ Pause young man!
Let the fallen rise, then strike ” :—With generous hand
Oslac the vi-king raises.—“ Stand then, stand,
Clear a fair space ” ! Alertly up Hagbard leaps,
Well matched in strength, in size, in symmetry,
Each had, apart, been called by the other's name,
And their bold hearts are equal ; which to select,
Or by king for their bearing, or by maiden for their beauty,
To balance had taken long : but now they stand
In gallant opposition, better far
To have been strait-sworn brethren. Oslac strikes,
And, but his sword glances, would have cloven the helm
Now he but lops the rim : Hagbard as stoutly
Smites on his foe, whose leathern tunic, proof
Against ordinary weapon, to such strength
Yields, yet saves life. To Oslac, the artfully
Compacted mail shirt is as impregnable.
Another noble stroke, and Oslac's shield
Cloven from his arm flies wide : around the limb
His trusty cloak he coils, and, with the blow rising,
Hagbard's helm he splits ; again they fall, they rise,

They rise, they fall again ; each again rises,
And breathless pants. Admiring, as breathlessly
All stand around nor hear the wild affray,
Still clanging, shrieking, groaning. On it rushes,
And, bounding in his energy, Hubba the cruel
Stands on the Saxon deck.—No lengthened space
Stands he secure.—Firmly the sea-men range
On either hand each dauntless chief around,
And the bark with carnage strew. Swaying aloft,
Hubba, his thundering mace well skilled to wield,
Nor less adroitly Odun's broad battle axe
Down all before them hew. One furious charge
And the Saxon decks are cleared,—or to their ships
Or into the surging depth the Pagans flee,
Nor longer close fight seek.—Odin leaps up
Chafed, fretted in his soul, all heaven grows dark
Beneath his frown, and lurid lightnings glare ;—
Close thickly around the god his Valkyries,
Keen, living lances, fly to either hand,
And swords vindictively gleam.—The war of men
Had been the field of gods, had not words of fate
Muttered upon Skullda's lip, had not heavy chains
In lowest hell clanked in their deep-shuddering ears. .
Fettered by dread they stand, or feign to sit
Willingly calm.—Beneath them Hagbard, lone
Bleeding in the hold lies dying :—In the strife
Aiming a blow at Hubba, who, dark in soul,
Shrinking from the vengeful glance in wary haste
Stepped back, and the swing of Odun's mighty axe
Upon the young chiefs hip struck full, and crashing

Off the flesh shared.—Hagbard was sister's son
To young Earl Sidroc, he who into Croyland
Bursting found the abbot with his aged monks
Clad in their sacred vestments, meekly sitting
Within the choir, chanting the Psalter through,
Hoping that helpless age and childhood might
Excite pity, even in Danes. Accursed crew!
Vain vain that faltering hope: brutalized Oskytul
Hewed down the abbot, even at God's altar struck
The heads from off his monks; torturing barbarity
Strove gold to extract and rich treasure, from
Old men half dead, and children scarcely born:—
All the vast edifice was vilely stained
With ever-crying blood:—Tombs broken down,
Graves ransacked, shrines destroyed, all, every
Nook and dark crevice saw their insatiate search
For soul-alluring gold:—Three days, three nights,
Inhuman deaths stalked round, then rose to heaven
Flame, heaven-insulting flame; one horrible holocaust
To their demon gods uprose.—Alone, alone,
Gloriously alone, noble warrior among fiends,
Young Sidroc saved a child, young, beautiful,
So like to Hagbard that he could not slay him,
But as his own he kept him.—That child survives,
Earl Sidroc fell in battle at Æscesdune.
Sleep, sleep the turf ever lightly on thy breast
Generous Earl Sidroc! and God give thee rest
Even in Abraham's bosom!—Pagan in name
True Christian in thy soul, be, be thou blest,
And seraphs welcome thee, when many a staid

Tonsured monk, who curses the faith thou hadst been taught,
Shall veil his face before thy humanity.—

Strait is the time, the hazard imminent,
Many stout men have fallen, yet half the foe
Are for encounter fresh ; far out the beach
Stretched in wide shallows, and the ebbing tide
Had their great strength repelled, but now it flows,
And invisibly Abdiel every chieftain prompts
To one decision. Wulfstan on the instant
Every coil cuts, casts every warp-line off :
The sweeps stretch out, each man his sitting reverses,
Pinnacle and keel, all that can swim or float
Tow them amain ; and as grim lions step
Backward before the hunter, lash their sides
And shake their awful manes, so the strong prows
Still face the foe, as stern foremost they draw back,
Not flee.—In sturdy arms, Thorkill and Oslac,
Now as virgin nurses tender, Hagbard bear,
And many a rough hand crosses a glistening eye :
The brave men honour the brave man, though a Foe
A Pirate and a Pagan.—Odun, the way
Leads to the last strong hold of Wessex realm,
Kynvit's high castle opens wide her gate
To the vi-king dying, against all living closed,
Vi-king or Sea-king.—In well-chosen site
And artful construction, Kynvit compacted stands
On every side secure, save on the East,
There but a wall of stone uncemented
From the moor divides it, nor that for defence
But a chieftain's privacy from curious gaze ;

In itself weak, stronger than threefold brass
Free-men's brave hearts behind that wall beat high.
Ostrida, fair daughter of the gallant Earl,
Lulla, and Leola, thralls of British birth,
The only females here.—Her stately step
Speaks her of noble lineage, her calm eye
Speaks her of noble blood ; blood which can beat
As high in the bosom of the meanest born
As of the highest, Virtue's true noble blood,
The blood of a noble nature, all else vile
Though the bosom under ermine heave. They bear
Hagbard to the Lady's-bower, small and not light,
Yet quiet, yet secure.—With ready hands
Strip they the wound, wash, cleanse it from the blood
And foul defilement, search its inmost depth,
And high heaven thank that although shattered sore,
And bruised, and terrible, the healthy gore
Has itself stanch'd. The throbbing limb they swathe,
And in their simple-hearted faith pray o'er
The warrior unconcious, trusting there
Where alone man can trust.—Of healing leek,
And gently soothing herbs, plucked when the moon
Right season duly marked, and hoarded up
With sedulous care against influence unbenign,
They make refreshing drinks, and duly watch
Wanderings delirious, and to calm his mind,
Humouring the wayward fancy as he praises
Eira's skill, physician she of the gods,
And he who from Mimur's fountain in his car
Waves the rough thorny wand, and torpor spreads

Over the weary world, with airy dreams
Cheering, oft teaching. Thus the virgins watch,
Pure guardian spirits, guileless of all ill.—
The warriors swiftly descend, the gallant barks
By strong cables moored to the sharp rocks and piles
Duly they find, huge anchors to the beach
Cling, all strained taut, the prows again they bind
Each to the other.—Well know they that the foe
Elated long by victory, and trained
By prosperous fortune or adverse, now to escape
And now to conquer, will, when Torridge slacks
Her foaming course, and Mane's brilliant car
Draws the obedient ocean tide, their fortune
Yet again dare.—Presciently, actively,
Men of all arms are stationed, missiles heaped
Such, and so ordered, that the god of war
Doubts even if war had been.—Nor do the pagans
Think now to hold on their course, hot is their blood
And eager, and Revenge, with gloomy eye
Dwells on the moaning Bison as she rolls
Far in the open sea. They have been bearded,
Taunted, almost repulsed ; the fury fierce
Stalks over every deck, hears but one curse,
One vow of vengeance.—Strait they drag along
Three captives wounded, their galled wrists hard bound,
Them to their Moloch slaughter : to Niorder
Heave their stark corpses, and stern Hubba prays,
“Dread God of battle ! who from Hlidscialf
Terror of Nations, throne of thine awful might,
High in Valascialf sitting, this day has seen

Our daring, and hast seen Valhallas gates
Thronged by our tribute, by thy maidens led ;
Of this oblation, into delighted nostrils
Draw the rich steam !—Bright goddess of the sword
Queen of red slaughter, Guider of the tide
Of glorious victory ; if ever spears,
And clash of bucklers, and the ring of mail,
And flash of sword-fire joyed thee, hear and save !—
Niorder, thou of the fluctuating wave,
The storm, the tempest, King, on roll our barks,
Towards the spoil impel them !—Giving unto ye
These victims, give to our impatient swords
Banquets of Saxon blood.—Rapacious birds !
To ye we give the slaughter. Hungry wolves !
To ye we give the banquet. Glorious Hrafn,
Standard victorious, Pledge of victory,
Glad honour to thee we give ! on, lead us on,
Cursed be he, the dastard who shall quail,
One tear of pity drop, or one qualm feel
Of horror, of remorse. Ragnar ! to thee
Again, again, again, to thee I devote
Long trains of slaves to wait upon thy feet ;
Gold, silver, jewels, wealth beyond all price,
Burnt upon thy honorary funeral mound
Thy spirit shall gratify. Blood for thy blood,
Vengeance for vengeance, foul horror for foul horror,
Terrify the heavens, desolate the earth”.—
And every heart beats vengeance, every tongue
Cries vengeance, every angry sword outleaps
And threatens, vengeance. Ocean with fury boils,

Onward they drive, and all the winds of heaven
Rise with their battle-cry. Taw and Torridge feel
To their remotest sources the fierce weight,
And the black moors quake throughout their wide extent.
First leads the Dragon, in every danger first ;
Emulous The Wolf bears down ; The Serpent next,
The Hawk, the Black Eagle, the Warhorse, and the Snake,
And of less note sixteen, thick thronging in,
All eager for the fray the harbour fill,
And Hrafn floats upon the breeze, and flags,
Rises and streams again, as in death's last
Soul-rending throe.—In full spread sail, a ship
Banner of Heiligisland the grey Wolf bears ;
A warrior armed, on a pure milk-white horse
Streams for Ditmarsöe ; on the Serpent's prow
Stormaröe's Hawk bears a white sailing Swan
Collared with gold ; and the Black Eagle ploughs
Her daring track under a golden globe,
Girt with a belt. From Venderland the Warhorse
Displays a majestic lion, and a dragon
With a strong eagle flying, emblem of bravery,
And prudence, and rapidity : bulls, falcons,
Sea-maids, and warriors, from the other prows
Flaunt the fresh breeze, and all around, wide shine
Gay as a summer field.—Over Kynvit waves
In free-born pride the White Horse gallopping.—
Fierce the disorder, fierce the onset, fierce
The desperate defence ; these not to lose
And those to gain, bent to their utmost might
Upon furious upon noble daring. Lance to lance,

And sword to sword, buckler to shield close set,
And helmets dazzling gleam, as the red surge
Rises, subsides, recedes, or on advances.
As two immeasurable serpents intervolv'd,
The blazing maddening hosts sternly compress,
Crush into the one the other. Saxon or Dane,
Opposer or defender, all demons now
Are rolling in fire, in blood. Rise not the living,
Nor fall the dead; nor those on slippery land,
Nor those afloat the massive rock can hurl,
Launch the lance, or wing the arrow, lest rash hand
Slay where it seeks to save.—One heaving bank
Of dying men and dead, ascends between them,
And o'er that bar the waves of slaughter dash
Into, crimson bloody brine. As the vast, swollen,
Terrific tidal wave, driving from the North
Pent between jutting head-lands, high-swollen pours
Into the shuddering depth, and rocks and shakes
Continents with it's roaring plunge: as Sabra's flood
Sweeps in broad-volumed pride, strong, resolute,
Unyielding; yet the ever-gathering mass
Only by it's crashing weight oe'rpoverpowering hurls her
Backward, yet still unyielding; so alone
Even by their ponderous energy the pagans
Back drive the Saxon knights. Yet inch by inch,
And foot by foot, and step by step they tread,
Retreating yet dauntless. Heavily Hubba's mace
And hard strikes at Odun, Odun's ready axe
Off it's head hews: Thorkill's enraged might
Could on the instant the pagan have stricken down,

The unarmed he scorns to strike. Another mace
Flies to the sea king's hand, whether had Thor
Sent to him Miolner by a Valkyrie,
Or human hand re-enarmed him none now ask,
But had the Belt-of-Prowess girt his loins
And given him giant strength, no giant ever
Fought with such superhuman prowess: Odun,
Collected in his might, firmer his lips
Compress each other, resolutely his brows
Knit, and his fiery, flashing, falcon eyes
Blaze lightnings. Strongly falls the thundering mace,
His trusted buckler splits, sonorous the helm
With the blow rings, daggers and shortened spears
From twenty arms strike at him, all fall short
Withered by his indignation. "Fight ye thus
Ungenerously, vile recreants?" Broad the axe,
Swung like a smith's fore-hammer, one head off
Flees a widely erring ball, the corpse erect
Stands spouting the life-blood: onward the blade
Crashes the bright blue helms; upon Hubba's neck
Smiting, he swerves: the golden gorget cloven
Off springs, but spent the glowing edge, though biting,
Blood scanty draws. Forward the warriors press
And with invisible swiftness form a strong
Tortoise-barrier broad and high. Wound in his cloak
His left arm taking all blows, vexed Odun cleaves,
And hacks, and hews, all Runic rhymes and spells
And Lapland witcheries and exorcised arms
Vain against Christian knighthood.—As a wolf
Thirsty and ravenous, eying a goodly steed

Springs upon a spar-fence, gripes, and bites, and gnaws,
So the strong hero vainly tugs the shields.
All his energy collecting, one noble blow
Strikes off bold Sigurd's arm :—Close to the ribs
The thundering weapon shares, down fall both limb
And shield : Into the fearful gap Odun presses on,
Closed the strong arch, again securely knit
Again and again repels him, fierce, fiercer still
He chafes, and chafes, and chafes, so the baffled wolf
Stalks right, stalks left, searches each crevice, tries
Each inequality of height.—“ Oslac and Oswulf,
Osmer and Ceolwulf, Redwald, Rainer, Lilla,
Bold chiefs, as ye are ready now be active,
Be firm, be resolute, yon Sea-King hides.”—
Forward they haste, nor Ceolred lags behind,
Osric and Ceorl, Hunwald and Wulfstan, Alf,
Alfwald, and Albert, noble Æthelwulf,
Æthelheard, Kynewulf, Oswin and Ceadwalla,
He from Demetia driven after daring
All heroic man could dare, and seen his blood
The blood of his own children, scoffingly sprinkled
Upon the holy altar of God, fled Eastward, swam
Tempestuous Sabra, on one arm bearing up
His youngest born, and between his teeth his sword :—
Sabrina waved her arms, bearing him on
And in safety landed him, for dearly she
Loves all of British blood. Hither had he fled
Even to the hated Saxons, with them sworn
Eternal amity ; now he redeems
His oath unflinchingly. Rapidly the thegns

The pointed wedge compact, their shields lock fast,
Their sharp spears couch, and Odun, once again
With a fresh shield defended, and high wielding
His broad red axe with Sigurd's blood yet streaming
Forms the desperate point.—As the granitic rock
Ponderous and time-defying, flakes and shivers,
And splintered falls not: so, though rent, though torn,
Though yielding, yet as instantaneously
Closing and bearing, each concussive shock
But renders the strong arch firmer; though rebounding
From each stern onset, yet the living wedge
Falls but more heavily, and blow upon blow,
Crash upon crash, upon onset onset fierce,
Driving the key stone in, the fabric falls.
In the fierce warriors rush, and now had sunken
Odun or Hubba.—Within a spear's cast, each
For the mortal strife prepares, but Haralf ashamed,
He in reserve for decisive emergency
In the black ship had stood with his men-at-arms,
Each tried, each selected, each firmly relied upon,
Each true to his standard: he in wrath upsnatches
Hrafn, and downward bears with all his crew
One black, one portentous mass: he in the front
And twenty close-locked shields on either hand
With strong protruded spears.—Stem on, amain
Presses irresistibly forward a mighty ship
Driven by an East-wind bleak, so they impelled
Their pitiless march force onward, overthrowing
Beating down, trampling, wounded, dying, or dead,
Groaning, or shrieking foe, or fast sworn friend;

Reckless, down all they tread.—Hot in pursuit
Of the full headed stag, the eager hounds
Had by that rolling rock been crushed : an angel
Swift as the will of Heaven, from Abdiel flies
And, as a spear's point, flashes on the right ;
As swiftly the Earl the imminence perceives
Of the overwhelming danger.—Hearing and sight
Thus touched become superhuman, and he stands
Refuge of friends, and terror even to death
Of his foemen paralysed.—Steadily backward he,
Steadily backward all his instructed thegns
Tread, as though bent, forward again to rush ;
And as the active foe again upclose
The shattered barrier, in close order set,
A vantage height he gains, and thence wide-seeing
Scans the whole field.—Here Hubba repulsed but yet
Not trampled down, here Hialto yet unscathed,
Vigorous and fresh. Still firm, still resolute
Yet war-worn, tired, and faint, his gallant bands.
Far on the left, strong Thorkill in his might
A ferocious giant treads, and there the strife
In its utmost fury raging, rout upon rout,
'The pagans pursues.—Odun the warrior would
Throw all his fortune on the hazard and
Again dash into the fight, but Odun the Earl
His inflexible duty knows, knows, and with strong
Yet mournful voice outcries. (The angel's breath
Bears on it's speed that voice which else the din
Of battle had o'erwhelmed ;) “ Our line wheel back ;
Where thousands press, hundreds cannot repel,

Lest we be broken."—Indignant, Thorkill hears
Where, yet unwearied, his iron energy
Smites hard, smites heavily; and cloven helms
And mailed shirts torn through, and carcasses,
And horrors upon horrors, witness well
His impetuous effort to pierce to, and strike down
The destroyer of his home. Knowing no fear
No danger he knows, there the vile foemen are
Betide what may he faces them. Bravely Ottar
With Ceolmund and stout Wulfstan, warrior staunch
And true as he is staunch, with the brave sea man
Resolutely their vantage hold, and Tatea,
Useless his cherished bow, with a good brown sword
High feeds the craving wolves: yet, skilled in war
Thorkill they urge to obey, and he obeys;
But as a bear by shouts and firebrands driven
From tempting, fat-fleshed kine:—so rough, so huge,
Backward paces the strong Sea-King, in sullen mood,
And back each Saxon thegn and freed-man wheel
With measured pace and slow.—Wounded and worn,
Begrimed with dust, with gore, under banners soiled
They stand in their proud confidence and feel
Yet fresh for a fresh encounter.—Night draws on,
The day star has gone down, hunger and thirst
Had been forgotten in their noble anger,
Now nature pleads hard for rest. Even Thorkill sees
How needful rest, and after short consult
The rear rank men first enter, and succeed
In steady order the tired men-at-arms,
Carefully bearing all their wounded in:

And the bold thegns, and the Earl with backward tread
Close Kynvit's groaning gate.—The Pagans stand
Gazing and wondering that such iron front
Has melted into stone, as fable they
The Dvergi looked upon by the rising sun
Become mis-shapen rocks. Glorifying they cheer
And their proud banners wave: Hubba elate
Strides in his mightiness, deeming all earth
Too little for his footstool, yet neglects not
He the duty of a chieftain: cautiously scanning
The height, the breadth, the depth, the strength, and all
The defensive means of the fortress; strong alone
In the brave souls of Saxon warriors,
Unvictualled, without water, save what Heaven
May pour down from the heavens. Considerately taken
His stern determination, mattocks, swords,
And helms, and hands, scoop in the astonished earth
A wide, capacious trench, stretching wherever
The wall of Kynvit stretches. So Gefione
Yoked to the brazen plough her giant sons,
Four sturdy steers, each with two blazing stars
Upon his ample front. Sturdily so they broke
Out through the smoking earth the Eira-sund,
And See-land in her virgin beauty rose
Above the astonished ocean. (Gefione married
Skiold, dread Odin's son, hence were her progeny
Skioldungr named, Denamearca's royal race
Of Leidre on Roeskilde-fiord).—Wild hurrahs rattling
Hail Hubba's right regal daring.—Round goes the ale,
The mead, the inspiring song.—Sea-Kings, sea-boys,

All in rude license equal, drink, devour,
And in intoxicated riot sleep.—
And the dead lie unburied, and the wounded
Fight for the dregs of life with ravening wolves.

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE THIRD.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E T H I R D .

The Christians hold a War-Council. Odin departs for Scandinavia. Freya incites two chiefs to extinguish the bale-fire. Hilda and Freya send dreams to arouse the Pagans.

And the sun had set serenely, as that the world
Had never known distress ; and the bright stars
Strewed the broad heaven with fire, and the pale moon
In his all-peerless beauty, placidly
Had arisen, and young eyes had tracked his course,
Seen chill Hrimfaxi urge his daring flight,
And pitied the pretty children, whom he stole
From Vidfur, as they bore the limpid wave
From the fountain of Bygvaro ; doomed to follow
As two brilliant points of light wherever Mane

Drives his resplendent car.—'Ere the matin hour,
That glorious moon Ostrida had beheld
Seeming as a guardian angel from heaven's height
To look down, and in serenity to calm
The spirit in it's restlessness.—Bileipter
Strong spirit of the tempest, in his wrath
Stalked, waving high his elfin arms in the rack,
And in his anguish howling, yet quailed not
The fair, cold planet. So ride on sublime,
In their calm confidence, the pure in heart
Through mist or storm, through pain or penury,
Through want, or through neglect, or contumely,
Through misery, or through disease. Then had her heart
Glowed in it's thankfulness, and in it's truth
Had poured out her whole soul before her God
In love in adoration ; and in it's playfulness
Questioning the far horizon, that young heart
Had asked if the silver waves there talked with heaven,
And in it's sadness wished that Heaven would be
A sojourner upon Earth, and purify
Hear dear, dear country, from the wasting fires
And the red reek of blood ; and that men might be
Brethren, as God had made them : for she had seen
Far o'er Sabrina's waves the smoky sky
In it's foul, fiendish lustre, those waves stain.—

Now has that young heart mourned it's own misery
And in it's own terror sunk.—The last fond kiss
Throughout the terrible day on her lip dwelt,
And the last throb, which even through his mailed shirt
Against her bosom beat high, even yet there

Beat in all it's parental yearning. Lonely and sad,
From the very topmost turret she saw all
The fearful fight, and her keen eye, strained hard,
Saw in it's fervency her prayers enshielding,
As an army of angel warriors his proud form,
And she prayed and wept yet the more fervently
God her sole refuge, God her only hope ;
And though the horrible carnage, though the wild,
The agonized shriek shook through her soul,
Still in her terror she looked on, and still
Listened to the fearful turmoil, terrified, yet proud,
Exulting, and exalted, and resolved,
To die as a Saxon Princess ; for she had heard
Of the holy maids of Elöe, and the shuddering thought
But nerved her for her purpose.—Now, as for feasting
Duly the hall she strews, such food prepares
As foresight had upstored, the thralls directs,
Aged and few, long to her father dear
The attendants of his youth, though slaves yet free,
In their brave master's kindness.—Bear they readily
High-foaming ale, cheering mead, and grateful wine,
Fresh-baken cakes, parched corn, and sturdy brawn,
No delicate cates but wholesome warrior's food,
And broad the fire ascending spreads around
An enlivening cheerful glow. Start into life
Grim, grey, hard warriors, with old legends quaint
And Odun's deeds of war and dangerous chase
Wrought by Elfgitha, so was her mother named,
And antlered skulls enormous, goring tusks
Trophies of speed and strength, flickering shadows stretch

Into the roof, keel-shaped, where the smoke hangs
As though it feared the cold. And the gray eye
Of gladsome evening in upon the scene
Looks, in such comfort glorying.—Her eye
Scans his whole form, sees nought but hostile blood.
And, in his safety joyous, hangs upon
His manly stature. Nor less that searching eye
Notes, as he enters, every chief, nor passes
The humblest by, and rejoicing in them all
Spreads the refection, with her active maids
And willing thralls, cleanses off foetid stains,
Washes their weary, aching, swollen feet,
Bears the full flagon, horns and tankards fills
Nor stints them in their draughts; then sedulously
Passes along each wall and every tower,
Enquires of all their escapes, and with each tear
Weeps, in each triumph triumphs. Valkyrie
Never in Valhalla had so sweet a task
Never discharged it half so gracefully.—

Short is the meal though ample, stretched along
On floor, or settle, or table, Dainer's wand
Need not renew it's waving, sleep, deep sleep
Laps them in her gentle pinions, while staunch hounds
Proud of their charge, keep watch.—Not so the Earl,
The Marshall of the Hall, and household thegns.
They, their charge too great for sleep, with Ostrida
War-Council hold: but first the grateful chief
And his bold compeers join in holy prayer
Of humble thanks, though scant of words, sincere.
“ Lord God of Hosts! God, in whose hands alone

Are the events of death or life ; God ! who hast saved
All who here kneel, our heartfelt thanks receive,
That through this day of blood us thou hast saved
To serve Thee, to serve Wessex, and to serve our King.
Be it in thy good purpose, save us now
In this our extreme extremity, confer
Strength on our arms, our hearts, into our souls
Pour thine own spirit of strength, bless and direct
Our counsels to thine own glory, to our own safety,
And to the holiest welfare of our country,
Stricken down and disabled. Greatly we have sinned,
But thou art holy, and will not chastise
So as to overtask endurance. Mercifully
Protect, defend us, and in thy mightiest strength
Smite down our enemies : or if it be best
For Wessex that we should die, let us die gloriously".
So prays the warrior.—From the scarcely moving lip
And from the inmost heart the prayer ascends
Of fair Ostrida : Secret between her and Heaven,
God and good angels only it's purport know :
But her whole form dilates, her eagle eye
Gleams with a resolute fire, and the strong heart
Beats high with daring. And they all feel cheered
And calmly confident, such power has prayer
When the strong man knows his weakness. Odun speaks,
" Friends we have striven nobly, boldly, firmly,
In God's might not in our own : The ardent heart,
And strenuous arm, have tasked Hubba's utmost power ;
He knows our vigour, and the weight we know
Of his energetic numbers, both to each unknown

'Ere this fair trial. Thus assuredly
Enabled each others worth to estimate,
It becomes us as God's true soldiers, well to weigh
Our next best measure, how that strength to use
Which Heaven in mercy yet has left^{us},
So as ourselves to defend to the uttermost ;
And, having done all man can do, trust in God
For his deliverance ; trust not placed in vain,
Or we had not this day's hard fight survived.
God does not save by many, often by few
Gives he most glorious victories, for that so few
Man knows it must be God's work and not his own.
But yet how stands our force ? Scarcely three hundred
Welcomed the rising sun, the ascending moon
Counts but two hundred now : the foe at least
Numbered two thousand, in three and twenty ships ;
One ship with all her crew went down, say then,
Both wreck and slaughter reckoning, they have lost
Three hundred, still they must outnumber us
Eight times, a fearful odds, yet these stout walls
Defiant may laugh at their excess of numbers
With your stout hearts behind them :—But beyond these
And the Providence of God, no more we count.—
Did we of our King know or he know of us,
Daring, by hope much might be justified,
No man such hope can hold. God, God alone
Knows of his hiding, if that he be hidden,
Or of his grave if dead, and, though assured
Alfred, my good, my brave, my generous King,
My true liege lord yet lives, no hope of aid

Have I but in Heaven, these good walls, and ourselves.—
Speak, now ye know the worst, What shall be done ? ”
“ Give me a ship and a stout-hearted crew
Well found, well disciplined, I then might know
How counsel to offer, here, I feel myself
To speak unfit, only nurtured to obey.
Before two foes, the brave man may not recede,
Before three, may step back once, nor loses honour
If before greater number he retreat,
Be they of equal arms : tried by such rule
The warrior’s good sound rule, excused we stand
Yielding to eight times our strength ; but, warriors !
Ye know not that harsh word, yield, and if ye did
Thorkill would not yield, nor would so counsel ye.
Promise or oath from that foul fiend to accept,
Who on blood nursed, upon blood only feeds,
We cannot ; we dare not yield. Certain is this,
If we have food, arms have we yet enough
And Thorkill says thus ; hold we our strength while life
And spirit shall bear us up, and, all else failing,
Burn we the castle over our own heads
And in Heaven trust for pardon of such sin.”—
Ceolmund arising speaks, “ True it is, Earl !
Here are we pent, before us lies a foe
So cruel, that even Cruelty herself
Would at so foul a name blush. Steep, on three sides
To him inaccessible, so equally
The rock our escape forbids, even had not he
Power us to intercept. We cannot hope
Aid from the king, but have we then no hope ?

Has our brave Earl no friends? For Ostrida,
I speak not of her beauty, of her grace;
Wessex bears beauty and grace of equal price;
But even Wessex, rich in lovely dames
Virtuous as lovely, scarcely her worth can mate
And her charity of heart. Let the bale fire
Tell to all heaven, all earth, Kynvit in trust
Holds Odun, holds Ostrida, that wolves and bears
Are lurching around her walls, vindictively,
Save where the Pagans press down with their feet,
All Wessex will be up in arms."—Instantly Oslac
Up to the turret climbs, as instantly
Blazes the cresset. Duncerig ablaze,—
Wide, wide around upon every distant height
Cries the red fire, "Kynvit in danger, arm"!
Æthelred marshal of the hall, long rule
And habitual strict observance, had impressed
Staid dignity upon his furrowed brow,
And the white beard shadowing his ample breast
Claimed reverence of all. Reverenced he is,
And of all beloved. By him young Odun schooled
Disciplined and firmly taught, that to obey
Is the first lesson in the art of ruling,
The speckled trout hooked, brought down with burning bolt
The sounding heron in his whirling flight,
Ran down the roe, tamed the indignant steed,
Gained each true grace of manly exercise,
Grew into a warrior ere he war had known,
And knowing war, had seldom yet been foiled
In feats of prowess. From their seats arising

All around their father gather, so in fondness
Entitled in common speech ; he calmly waits
Until the sharp clanking of their weapons hushed,
Attention well assures, and thus he speaks ;
“ Children, I oft have fought, this once strong arm,
In my youth strong indeed, when Beornwulf
Flushed with successful usurpation, thought
Glorious Egbert would sue for peace, and hold his crown
As to Mercia under tribute ; he indeed
In foolish infatuation, having driven
Ceolwulf from that throne which he had avengingly
Wrested from Windreda, when she had foully
Most foully murdered Kinelm, Kenwulf’s child,
Her brother and liege lord, though but a child ;
He dreamt, rich fool as he was, mayhap to be
Bretwalda, and to lead kings in his train,
He King of Kings. At Wilton, with men of Wilton,
With men of Wessex, men whose hearts were stout,
Whose arms where strong, Egbert, the invader met ;
Beornwulf there learnt the mightier strength of skill
Ranged against multitude, and fain had given
All his gold for a better horse. I then was young,
I then was swift ; pursuing as he fled
Spattering the blood with hoofs unpitying,
Lest he should escape I with my whole force leaped
On to the horse ; grappling the king I fell,
With me he fell, shouting and screaming out
As though a wolf were gnawing into his neck ;
So screamed so shouted he, that suddenly
Seized with uncontrollable laughter I relaxed

My hold, and with a most unknighly kick dismissed
The would be King, who his crown with his life
Left in East Anglia. Such was I in youth.—
When in mature manhood, I have held my own
Against Roderic Mawr, he stalwart warrior
Ill had deserved disgrace. Than Wessex men
None else had driven him back, and Burrhed had
But been as Beornwulf, had not Æthelwulph
Boldly poured in with the best Saxon blood
Against the best blood of Gwynnedd. There Earl Odun,
A stripling hero wielding a maiden sword,
Was with his war-father, neither following ;
Where was his standard, there was Odun seen,
Where Odun fought, there his flag was conspicuous,
There both gained repute which made our both cheeks blush :
And it was right noble praise and generous,
When the best man of Gwynnedd gave to each
A sword and buckler to avouch our worth.—
But such were worthy foes : all fought, when fighting
Was duty, and none flinched ; but when at peace,
The grey wolf and the sleuth-hound fearlessly
Gambolled with friendly teeth and harmless claws.—
Not so with these, fixed peace nor truce fast sworn
Bind them, sly fraud, inconceivable treachery,
All unsparing lust, unbounded ferocity.
Their code of honour ; fighting, we must fight
And never, surrender, cry.—Well may we seek
Extrinsic aid : arrive it may or not,
If it arrive be grateful, but repose not
Upon uncertainty. Trust we then only

Ourselves, and to our confidence be true.
Man we the walls, with every needful art
Strengthen the outer guard, hold it as long
As human endurance can hold : if overpowered,
Still have we the strong keep-tower.—But ye must,
Young men, ye must endure.—Valour alone
Is not the warrior's weapon, warriors must
Endure, and still endure. Now your endurance
Will to the utmost be tried. Hunger and thirst
Than steel more deadly enemies, more fierce
Than arrow, spear, or lance, will task us all :
Fear I these assaulters only. I have known
Their biting edge, edge, that no armour close,
Nor tough shield can fend off.—Our winter store
Of salted flesh and corn, has been reduced
By these our friends, I speak not in their dispraise,
They were in need, we of our plenty gave :
High Heaven forbid we should have ever refused,
For Heaven still blesses those who aid distress,
But this has straitened us. This might we bear,
But how endure parching thirst?—Astounded all
Stand in consummated calamity,
To disbelieve it still striving.—There it frowns,
No phantom, light-avoiding, but a vast
Giant overpowering, and they stare, as Death
Had with ten thousand terrors fresh from Hell
Stood threatening.—Famine glares on every wall,
In every dark recess gaunt famine glares,
Shades the grey floor, from the black roof looks down,
Moans in each wind, shrieks aloud in every gale,

In the pale embers, in the smouldering flame,
Thirst dries them, every airy shadow seems
Substance to their shrivelled substance.—This, this blow
Has stricken down every hope.—Even Odun sits
Striving sternly against the vision ; terribly
The features intrepid, meagre yet with with care,
His feverishness betray.—Around far spreads
Water, but the heavenly treasure none
Ever can hope to dip. The clouds of heaven
May rain, may pour ; but, or it for ever rain,
Still must they die of thirst : too dreadful death
For man in his most bitter malignity
To wish his deadliest foe.—Stand, lean, or sit,
Men who upon the instant still would dare
To wrestle with the extremity of danger
Are against this terror helpless.—Ostrida
Stands alone calm in Heaven's confidence.
She knew of that utmost evil, had looked at it,
Had scanned, and weighed, considered, and decided,
(For God had sent Abdiel to counsel them,
And, as of her own suggestion, she had seemed
To ponder, to reflect, when it was Heaven
Had so in her mind infused) and modestly
She speaks : “ My father, and all ye my kinsmen dear,
For all are kinsmen in such peril joined ;
I had not spoken but that all have said
All each can say. I pray you bear with me ;
More fit to listen twice than to speak once,
I speak mistrusting myself. Ye find that defence
Protracted however long, must yet have end

In lingering, in certain death, death terrible

In all forms, but in this most terrible.

Death thus assured, inevitable if here

Immured we lie, may yet be avoidable

In the open field :—were it not valourous,

Nay were it not duteous, nobly to attempt

Some deed of daring hardihood, and die

At once, and once only, than here miserably

Each to die, and to die again ; and hope, if hope

Were in despair, to be most wretchedly

The very last to die ; the last to sit

And see himself, in every corpse, shadowless

Stiffening in the gripe of death ?—Hope, glorious hope

Cries, it shall not be so.—Hope, glorious hope

Encourages this weak heart.—There are the foe,

Swilled riot has 'ere this her task fulfilled,

Watch-fires are dying out, Silence has spread

Over them her misty mantle, could not we

Collecting all our force, strike suddenly,

And, for its very suddenness, securely " ?—

In the murk night, the broad, dazzling lightning flash

Calls into life, from death's deep-mantled gloom,

Forest, and fell, and flood, Even so they glow,

Not so decay. Hope waves her ensign bright

Her many-coloured ensign, woven by Joy

In the glad loom of Faith, and the clear glow

Is as the flush of morning brightening on.—

In the very agony of transport, all

Could fall down and adore, as though fire from heaven

Had touched an angel's lip.—Odun yet checks

Exuberant joy, and recalls them cautiously
To the steadiness of Council.—“ Well may it be
God in his mercy thus my child has moved,
Women in soul being more impressible
By influence divine, and she may be
His honoured instrument our steps to guide
In duty’s most safe path ; or it may be
The impatient outpouring of an ardent mind
Deeming all possible that heart can wish.
Desperate, the danger bids us duly pause,
Cries weigh each aspect, wisely guard against
Mischance by forecast, and so compact our strength.
Striking, we must strike hard ; and, striking hard
Must strike effectually. Himself the giant
Each man must feel assured, and that success
Depends upon his strength only.—Cool we thus
Our thoughts, for they are hot.—A chosen few
Can from our vantage-height their camp explore
And, for this spring-tide moon rides clear and high,
Trace out their chieftains tents, note how disposed
Their watch, and how prepared.—Those can refresh
Their weary limbs and minds with soothing sleep
Here who remain, and those who service take
Can, on returning, rest ; so shall we be
More apt, more vigorous, or to think or act.”—
Such counsel well approved, straight they select
Odun and Thorkill, Ceolmund, Wulfstan stout,
And Oslac ardent, for the cautious task ;
Securely sleep the rest.—Meanwhile the pagans
To the full swilled, lie under tents or shields

By their chiefs well arranged, into confusion yet
Thrown by the wild debauch : license their rule
Misrule their subordination ; where each man
Rages a mad demon in the exciting fight,
Rages a mad demon in his cruel glut,
In his carousal rages a mad brute.—

And the cold moon looks down.—Hrimfaxi's bit
Scatters the hoar frost wide ; sharp-gnawing rheums
Pierce through both flesh and bone ; deep, sluggish sleep
Sleep, as the sleep of death, broods down and seals
Each faculty benumbed. Full have they filled
The measure of their cruelty : God now fills
The measure of retribution.—Even now a dream
Stoops over Hubba : he right joyously
Sees Famine, riding upon a brindled wolf,
With her huge claws tearing blue corpses up
Herself and her steed glutting, wide around
Hungry the birds of hungry heaven stoop
Contentious, in lean craving tearing the bare
Dry sinews by the fiend away cast ; and he laughs loud,
Leaping and dancing as the red reeking flame
River and stream uplaps, leaving Wessex wide
A dry, a thirsty rock, but one lone owl
At her desolation hooting.—Not so joys
Odin, ferocious fiend ; Curbed tightly in
The abhorred bit he champs, and, wrathfully
Rolling his haggard eyes, to Freya speaks.

“ Goddess, our spoil we have, and such spoil may
Yet have, while death sits monarch over life,
Filling his cold maw with all things that be.

While that men adore us, yet may we retain
Assumed divinity, and ourselves call
Gods, so as by man entitled. Fate is sealed.
Odin's high name shall live but in memory
Among things which have been ; yet may we all still live
Under other guise in other climes : nay, even here
If without open votaries, can shrine
Ourselves in every man's rebellious heart
In despite of these our tormentors. Yet wherefore sit
Cowering sit, rather than in arms at once
Our fate to put on the issue, and in our might
Him again assail ? At worst, we know the worst,
At best, we know that but for awhile we here
In fond dominion sit, to fall assured
Under chains of darkness—unless—(and even the daring
Desperate thought, adds to strength energy)
Unless, and by one resolved effort we dethrone
Him who has dethroned us.”—“Odin, for thus
Still shall I call thee, worthy would be that thought
Worthy would be the high daring, if or good
Or mitigation of evil might result
From such encounter. We have known how strong
How irresistibly strong is his fierce vengeance,
And rather shall find our strength lie in subtlety.
We may not dethrone, but we may make that throne
Not worth the holding, sow it with thorns, and cares,
And griefs, and disappointments. Thou as the God
Of Slaughter, still mayest ensanguine all his work,
I, as the Goddess of Pleasure, may enervate,
May degrade, may drown man's soul. Pride, cruelty,

And lust, and every sin, He calls it sin
Not to work out his will (as that I would
My very nature belie) yet shall destroy
Their hundreds, their thousands, their millions. Yet have we
Our chance that in detestation, in disgust,
This his once loved work may eftsoons be so abhorred
That we may be left to hold it. Better here
In some joy to riot, than far hence to be
In torment for ever fast bound. Even should it be
But for short time, all that short time is gain.
Hope yet is not wholly lost, that even here,
Even in this fair isle our honours may
Be restored in superior splendour, and the Cross
Be into oblivion swept, ever there to lie,
To rot, and to be despised.—This band destroy,
That homeless wanderer slay, whom none now know
Or knowing all contemn, and once more we
From North to South, from East to West may sail,
And taste the savoury steams, and be as gods.—
Yet yon alarm fire, may from every hill
From every vale and stream Christian men collect,
To aid these imprisoned Christians, hateful race!
Checked, we not openly assault may dare
But due means we may use: that gaudy fly
Denied us not use of means:—I will incite
Destruction of that flame, so left shall they
Certainly, securely fall.”—So Freya speaks,
Odin thus to her, “Well hast thou counselled, be
This thy glad task, while I to Scania sail
Revenge again to fire, to inspirit hate

So making assurance more than doubly sure."—
Arises strong Odin in his high majesty
To travel in his might. As of bards created,
In semblance so the fiend in splendour moves
Meteoric, in fulgent arms close clad
Assault to repel prepared. At his voice, Sleipner
Stretching out in hurricane speed to sight is lost
'Ere he has appeared to start.—Sleipner was foal
Of swift Sudelsar and that demon horse
Whose strength had enabled the giant architect
In one winter to build a fort impregnable,
But that through Loke's device he wasted time
Seeking his maddened steed, by love inflamed:
Else had the Gods lost Freya, and the Sun
And Moon journeyed with her into Jotunheim,
And, lost, the Asi had wandered in the dark.—
Freya now counsels Gna, glad messenger
Of Fensaler's lady; rides she her errands swiftly
And now sits, ready horsed, to ride or fly
In such emergency, whate'er betide.
To strong Hattstryker, by Gardvora foaled,
Hofvarpner's hoofs upon thinnest air, or fire,
Or over water gallop. Named from Gna,
Witch-wives who travel the sky, by men are termed
Gnævari. She now tasks his utmost speed;—
He, as the lightning glance, the wondrous length
Leaps from the Solar-shield, Sualiner hight,
To the chill earth; she, in an instant changed,
As graceful Hornklofi stands by the grassy couch
Of Frotho, and touching his shield, "Young chief," she says

Seekest thou renown bright as the golden fire?
To thee is honour dear"? Shaking the frost
Off from his forehead, he intently listens—
"Honour to thee is dearer, Eiric's son
Than the bright flash of gold, yet is honour known
By the golden rewards of honour; So shall bracelets,
Broad, brilliant bracelets, given by our bold king's hand
Glitter upon thy strong arms as deserved success
Shall upon thy daring smile." Ardent the youth
For glory ardent, as ardent to return
To fair Gunnhilda; Gunnhilda of Odinsöe
Whence his dark snække bore her joyous freight,
Who through the long long nights had counted hours
Deeming them years, in hope of his glad return;
Hope sadly delusive.—To his feet he leaps,
Braces his belt, presses down his bright blue helm,
Grasps his tough lance, gripes hard his maiden shield
And graceful as Uller stands.—"Yon bale-fire calls
All Wessex to the rescue, happy the hero
Whose agile limbs to that height bearing him,
Slaying the warders shall that flame destroy;
Hubba shall give him vests and shining arms
And he shall honoured sit before his peers
When the clear ale crosses the fire. Hornklofi's lay
Shall throughout Valhalla echo to his praise."—
Scarcely his dark eye glances to the flame
And back to the speaker, 'ere, that speaker gone,
In doubt he stands if not dreaming, yet the words
In his ears ring, honour and Gunnhilda
Gunnhilda and bright honour: had the depth

Upstood to contradict, despite of the depth
He had sworn to the goddess' voice.—Alertly he
To arouse Hialmer hastes ; pledged in true blood
Brothers they fought and lived : young Hialmar
Beauteous Sigrida loved, beauteous yet proud
Hialmar's vows she scorned, yet was her heart
Won though her hand was cold. As Uller, Frotho
Is handsome, agile, heroic, than his barbs
None truer to their aim, but dark of soul
Odin's glad cup to his lip has never borne
Boda, the blood of Quaser, poet's mead.
Hialmar is bright of soul : his tongue can utter
The delicious song of love, the darkening hail
Of war's harsh storm will from his clear throat pour
As Trollhætta's cataract ; nor does renown
Coyly flee from his eager wooing, she has kissed him
In the fiery strife, howling wolves have gathered round
His war-spear, and he yet hopes in the full
Pride of his honour the rich prize to gain
Of all his daring deeds, Sigrida's heart.
So the youths loving, so in friendship true,
"Stainless as Frotho and Hialmar," were
Familiar words friendship to exemplify,
"As Frotho and Hialmar," familiar words
When the blithe widows and gay maidens talk
Of Freya's honied vows. One heart, one soul
They have, and it lives between them. As young dogs
Gambol, and bite, and leap, and each incite
The other to the chase, then swiftly start,
So start the heroes, yet with warrior skill

Beat through the shade concealed : wherever shade
Spreads not, they crawl, or bound as agile roes,
And true to their object never lose a step.
The gathered host they pass. Soundly asleep
No outguard challenges. The trench they gain
It's dark depth thread and the steep bank ascending,
Across the plain, spring as two darting snakes
And into shade dive again. Now warily
Tip-toe they tread, lest even warm-breathing should
Startle the warders whose spear points gleam as stars
In the frosty moon-beams. Now they the limit gain
Where upon the dizzy cliff the North wall ends.
In noisome weeds the bright blue helms they shade,
Silent make each clanking ring, and scale with care
The sea-worn tower, as sea-men only can
Such giddy height ascend ; even by day
Perilous task, almost hopeless.—Hialmar first
Reaches the parapet, impetuous feat
Worthy of better fate. Sharp Warmund here
Holds guard, a post of honour : Heimdaller
Scarcely has more active ear, more agile hand.
Swiftly his axe cuts into the smoking brain
Through to the shoulder blade, a sloping wound,
Down drops the corpse : Frotho to his sworn pledge
True, leaps within the parapet, and tugs
Hard for the weapon. Nor the one can gain
Nor the other lose, 'ere the ready sinewy hand
Firm gripe renews. Watching his moment, Frotho
In the gullet his crooked knife buries, down at once
Warmund falls, furiously fighting in despair,

With giant death wrestling hard. Eagerly Oslac
Leaping, gripes hard both the axe and the ruddy wrist,
And at the instant, reach the exploring chiefs
This highest point of the fortress.—Twining, struggling,
Equal in skill, equal in strength, in youth
Equal, and in every manly exercise,
Stags in their rage of heat upon Dartmoor wild
Ne'er with deadlier purpose fought. Wrestling they close
They fall, they roll, as each to the other bound
And from the steep down fearful height, as a huge rock
Fall—Separated yet unstrained, Frotho scared flees,
Up the wall springs, down leaps, flees along again :—
Oslac pursues, leaps up, leaps down, pursues
Yet loses ground—grasping a ponderous
Stone, heaves he, and rising, launches with his might
The crushing mass : full below the shoulder blade striking
It crashes in the bone, the turgid liver
Bursts, rends the spleen and gall. Prone stretched, he lies
Dead—O Gunnhilda and Sigrida ! vainly
Vainly, yes vainly, shall your straining eyes
Sweep o'er the broad blue wave—No speck, no speck,
Far in the dim horizon shall ye see
To comfort your sad hearts. Sit down, sit, weep
Each with the other ; know ye now that war
Weaves amid glory misery.—Returning
Oslac needs friendly aid that bound to scale
He in his energy had leaped, as leaps
The wild horse in his youthful blood to join
His favourite mate. Again the night deep sleeps.—
Each Standard noting as it waves infixed

At the head of every brotherhood in arms ;
And Hrafn victorious, by it's greater height,
And each black tent holding it's gallant chief
And chosen guard, yet not distinguishing
All, though the moon shines freezingly.—Deep mist,
Low, dense, ocean-mocking mist, far and wide wraps
In it's beautiful grey wreath all meaner heights,
As the thrice pure snow into one even plain
Levels hollow and hillock : enough yet have they seen
And gladly, for the frost bites keenly cold,
Seek the hospitable hearth.—The bracing air,
The ardour of the chase, reviving hope
All have their hearts re-nerved, right cheerfully
Pledge they to each other's safety, nor forget
That power to thank which from such ribs of death
Such glowing life has called up.—Not unobserved.—
Hilda, foul fiend, ever rejoicing in,
Ever perpetuating human misery,
Luring men on with the triumph of victory,
With visions of glory, pomp, and high parade,
With beauteous eyes rejoicing in manly strength,
With manly strength exulting in it's power
Voluptuous forms to protect or to possess,
That she may gloat her eyes with every death
In every horrible form, lighting it all
With radiance false, and oer the foetid foulness
Waving wide her crimson flush and golden gleam,
Until maddening nations plunge into the whirl,
Believe it, and call it glory :—Hilda floats
Over the field solicitous, hoping to glut

With the deep gasp her vampire spirit dark,
With the agonized groan her lust to feed,
In anguish to see them twine, to hear them howl,
Execrate, revile, and grind inhumanly
The flesh of each other in jaws insatiate,
And their burning, fiercely tormenting thirst to slake
With blood of each other.—Sailing silently
With starting eyes, with lips compressed close
She, savage in fiendishness, the fleet explores,
The field explores; the camp swiftly traversing
Wide wheels o'er Kynvit's towers, deeply inhales
The death-steam of her expectation, wildly paints
The exaggerated horrors, and to her soul
The delicious vision hugs.—Thus sweeping, she
Sees, hears, treasures up; her wings impetuously
Pour along as war chariots thundering, as the blast
Of trumpets clangouring.—Baying the wolf
Stays in his ravening, fleeting the owl
Hoots, slinks away noiselessly, and from the feast
Of blood, every filthy, repulsive reptile crawls
Shuddering. Above, around, the roaring rush
Spreads over the moaning ocean, moans throughout
Plinlimmon's vast height, and from crag to crag
Leaping re-echoes.—Over Heraclœe
Freya and her demon sisters resting, hear,
Hear, shrink in terror; the tempestuous sword
Of Abdiel wide-curving had not been
More dread-creating: know they well the worst,
Knowing, that worst they dread.—With her haste panting
The demon, discord-breathing, heaves and gasps:

Raging her eyes round rolls, speaking in thick
Tones and convulsed her tidings. “ Freya, there,
There in you strong hold, there in those crumbling walls,
There beneath that baffling blaze, would that I had
Hurled down the cresset, there are to us dismay,
Misery, destruction, concocting : We, we chained,—
Oh that we dared in our former energy
Those tormentors to encounter in the hot strife,
And destroy them, or ourselves destroy. We chained, we,
We chained, we bound, we fettered, must look on
Must witness our craft outwitted, our toil o’erthrown
Our honours, our splendours, upon the instant eve
Of glorious consummation, scattered as,
Scattered as straws in the whirlwind.”—“ Vain our hope,”
Freya replies ; “ Vain was our fondly cherished
Our delusive hope, that here, in these utmost isles,
Shut off, divided from the wide spread world ;
Of our age-honoured dominion, he had left
Space narrow and bleak enough ; bleaker, narrower
Were it, it were glorious heaven compared with that
Spirit-consuming Hell, consuming ever,
Never to cease consuming ; in respite here
To breathe from corroding fires retributive,
Which fate and He who all fate overrules,
On every rolling wave of time’s dark scroll
Paint in letters of living fire. Even here
Dominion is envied us. When in our strength,
Strength undiminished, overthrown, not lost,
Well indeed had he feared our energy
And before our daring quailed ; now that age on age

In ravaging desolation have worn us down,
Shorne us of wisdom, of counsel, left to use
Nought but malevolence, cunning, and deceit,
Passions of slaves, wherewith our wills to work,
Not to enforce: As we have decreased, he
In glory has increased, and stupendous power,
Power stupendously all thought beyond;
That could in the hey-day triumph of our might,
Of millions the might, each in himself a God,
With his sharp-vollied thunders plunge us down,
As a howling cataract into uttermost depth,
There lock and bar us close, surely he need not
Seek our deeper degradation."—Hilda thus;
"Boots it not us to expostulate, or cringe
Beseeching, where pleading or expostulation
Idly were thrown away. Fixed is our fate,
Certain, irremissible, nor shall we gain
By sorrow, or lose by malice: pain and woe
Await us, we know it, and heroically
Dare in the teeth look pain, and sturdily
Grapple and wrestle with woe, victors or victims,
By excitement beguiling our torment.—I rest not:
Leagued as we are with death, and bound to hell,
It can be but a rivet tighter at the worst,
That rivet I am nerved to bear. Yes, I will waste
Will rend in my vengeance this devoted world,
'Till not a mount, or rock, or barrenest plain
Has been by war unscathed. With hurrying steeds,
With glaring torches, I a flame will light,
Blood shall not quench, nor yet shall mercy quell

With her loud wail the clangour of my trumpet,
Until the day of doom. Bellona armed,
Or Hilda raging, on I fearlessly
In his face hurl defiance.”—Soft in blandishment,
Clad in delicate tissue, in tone fascinating
(So spirits of hell can loveliest sex assume
Or trip a fairy, or stalk a revolting gnome)
As she were pleading for her Oder lost,
Oder for whom seeking weary months and years
Weeping rich golden tears, throughout every clime,
Every nation of the world, hence many-named,
Vanadis, Astarté, Venus, or Isis, long
Worshipped in Egypt, and in every tongue
Honoured by endearing epithet ; Freya speaks ;
“ Fit were this time, Freya with horrid arms,
Helm terror-plumed, and gore-distilling blade,
With Hilda would be as Hilda, suns obscure,
Wrap in blood the universe, but she knows well
Our deadliest weapon is man ; He the more wounded
By his crime than by our aggression. ’Ere that we
Into fateful conflict launch, conflict wherein
Reverse is assured, success beyond wildest thought
Over these, armed, and for encounter ripe ;
In deep consult it must behove us well
To concert, to mature our concert, and as gods
(Gods will I say and in despite of Him)
In wisest debate to sit :—It behoves us now
Bereft of superior counsel, to be more,
To be more especially wary.—Conquest-flushed,
Furious, and energetic, Hubba warned

Desperation may countervail: therefore would I,
By tutored dreams visit each chieftain's couch,
Drenched though they be and exhausted by revelry,
With forecast of danger, diverse yet alike
Tending to one object; so may each, deeply awed
By supersitious fears, no longer bemire
His soul in benumbing swill; swill well incited
When it shall work out our end, but now to be
Checked by strong omen, lest drunken enervation
Unfit them or to assail or to resist."—
Skullda, dread arbitress of fate, in folly
In besotting folly named, in trepidation,
As dreads the god-maker the dread god he makes,
From or stock or stone, converted into a god,
Even by gods besought, (strange that spiritual,
Though spiritual nature fallen and debased,
So could believe their own lie and trust in it.)
Arising in swollen majesty, as children
Yoked for brave steeds, curvet, or prance, or bound,
Aloft toss their heads, and champ, and neigh, and plunge,
Or as in headstrong license gallopping,
Drag in the dust their sprawling charioteer;—
Turgid with pompous pride and solemn sense
Of impressive dignity, fondly she deems
Her form, her frown, her tone, of fate are full.
“Cautioning I spoke, unheeded my prescience,
Now my decrees ye inspect.—Inspect, yet hear;—
Deep in the womb of ages, deep, yea deep,
Deep beyond sight of gods, or where or when
Acutest conjecture fails, all fate inscribed

Is by fate sealed, yea by oath ratified ;
Oath that has shaken every extreme of earth,
Oath that has shaken throughout it's depths all Hell,
Oath that could shake the everlasting Heaven.
Talk ye no more, on with your destined work
Fate so has willed, what Skullda speaks is fate."—
Wondering, in awe, gazing the goddesses
But conjecture the oracular will, as that their souls
Had drank the besotting draughts of men, by bard
Or by juggling priest distilled.—Hilda alone,
Hilda alone by furious anger blinded,
Mutteringly dares hesitate, so dread the tone,
Aspect, and portentous bearing.—Freya up
Evokes the intangible :—evoked they rise
As Hialtio's rolling from Niemi lake,
In far Tornea, famed for wizard art
And necromantic spell ; evoked they rise
Separate yet thickly involved, each might be either
So distinctly indistinct, confusedly clear,
Meaningly meaningless, interpretable
As will seeks the interpretation.—Moulded to
Mission obscure, away with instant speed
Flit they, and mingling with mist congenial,
Crouch close to each chieftain's ear, instilling fancies
Into thought's secret chamber.—No more Hubba
Sleeps, as death had found and turned him into stone ;
Feverishly turning, and uneasily
Wrestling against the impression, yet he sleeps.

A caged lion round and round his den,
Heaving his indignant heart, in sullen roars

Vents his fretful rage.—Shaking his matted mane,
Lashing his sides, o'er-springing a fragile fence
Bounding along in unrestrained might,
Thundering his death-blow fells a goodly steer
And to the desert off the prey he bears,
As a kestrel bears a lark. Moaning he heaves,
Mara too heavily on his broad chest sits,
Brooding down, griping, crushing, binding him
Through suffocating plenitude. In fire
Whirling, in foul pits choking, as a stone slung,
The soul-bewildering dream breaks not his sleep.
Heavy, he heavily lifts, then his head drops
As it were lead.—To Haralf, a witch-wife yells
Down a sleeping gaunt wolf's throat, reeking with blood
And in his surfeit vomiting ; languidly
His blood-shotten eye feasts on a festering corpse :—
As his distended paunch distension loaths
Angry, a ram batters his aching head,
Draws back, rushes on amain, again draws back ;
And as a mountain rock, by Elorrid
Hurled in his wrath the ringing skull beats in,
Bespattering all heaven ; racked the brain
Throbs even to bursting, yet he still dreams on
By convulsive shriek and shudder, betraying dread,
As Loke beneath the dropping venom : He
Wakes not, though mentally struggling with his bonds.—
Sigurd sits dalliant on a kingly throne
In his own hall :—Beauty the goblet kissing
Enhonies the rich gold ; the goblet splits,
The mead is kindling fire ; the rafters crackle,

The strongly connected walls with furnace heat
Glow as molten silver.—At every window's height
Hangs a grinning wolf, all fire ; the fiery pack
Down leap, they beset, they tear, they swallow him,
Yet still he lives and knows himself alive ;
In every insatiate maw : maw wholly fire,
He a consuming coal.—With torture gnashing
Hurls he off the horrible vision, swears and sinks
Still dreaming in drunken unrest, sensibly
Too senseless to make escape.—Benumbing all,
Intemperance and drowsy Dainer, nod
Over their votaries.—Hrimfaxi scatters
Foaming the thick hoar frost, the chilling dew
Seal their deep slumbers ; nor yet man-at-arms
Chieftain nor king, heed vision, sprite, or god,
But gluttonous stupefaction disgustingly
Wraps the whole host in her debasing pall.—
Drooping, the melancholy visions sink
Deep into Niflheim, there wail, there moan,
In thin stridulous sounds, flitting upon the pulse
Of the gaspingly sluggish gloom.—Astounded, yet
More and yet more, as they watch in anxiety
With ominous inspection, the Gods read,
Terrified each others dread, as time elapsing
The deceivers brings not back :—Gazing sit they
As mothers, who, their daughters far from home,
Into the murky night look, or on tiptoe listen,
With finger upraised, to the light frail leaf whirled
By a truant breeze along the crisped path,
And foul fears conjure up of midnight hags,

Of cavernous pitfalls, or, more harrowing
Licentious men's wild wills.—While thus suspense
Crouch they over Heraclöë, bleak, barren, lone,
Haunt alone for demons fit: on the main-land,
Enlivening charity, ambrosial light
O'er Kynvit's tower diffusing, angel smiles
Welcome the Heaven-born grace. Ostrida comes
From Hagbard's couch direct: thrice happy chief
In such assiduous nurse, yet knows not he
In the feverish weakness, but that Valkyries
Have to Valhalla borne him; and he lies
Obedient, patient, drinks the medicinal draught
And blesses the hand which such blessed goblet bears.
Ceadwalla's fair child pillowed behind his head
Laughs in it's sleep: infancy, helpless manhood,
(The dove with the hooded hawk) serenely rest,
Ministering spirits watching them carefully.—

Again rich bacon, cakes, and hot spiced-ale
Bears she around: the warriors take and pledge
Health each to the other, health to sleeping friends,
Health, and good angels droop their pitying eyes,
Health unto Christ the Saviour; warrior's pledge
From the rude heart freely bursting, in it's truth,
Aye in it's gratitude:—Sublimer prayer
May from the tutored lip more flowingly fall
Yet not be so accepted.—From their rest
Æthelheard, Oswald, with Ceadwalla rise,
Ceolwulf, and Redwald, Lilla, Osfrid, Ceorl,
Ceolred, and Hunwald, Wulfere, Alfuald, Elf,
Tatea, and Athelwulph; and in Council short

Sit and concert, soon as glad twilight spreads
His halo in the East, Daglinger named,
(Daglinger father, Nott dark mother of Day,
Joying both ever in their beauteous child,
Ever on the limit of two oceans waiting
His track to speed, then to receive him from
Fair Sunna's resplendent car) in Heaven's might
Gloriously to conquer, or avenged to die.—

All that have need of rest, renewing rest
Take, all that watch, offensive arms prepare,
String their strong bows, adroitly fledge their shafts,
Poise spear or javelin, search each ring of mail,
And gaily for that bridal morn out look
Which to bright honour weds them.—Calmness, Heaven
Into their souls has breathed, they as angels stand
In serenity watching for that glorious day
When death shall die and hell in hell be locked.—

From high Duncerig's triple fire-hearth, spread
Northward, South-westward, Eastward, and from the midst
Blazing the pyres ; Piled high around they spread
And Wessex call to arms. Malvern and Bredon, far
In the North-eastward see them, and far South,
Tamara and the Sister-beacons clearly
See and reply ; and all the Southern coast
From Cornubia to the Solent catch the blaze,
Dauntlessly repeat it : hearts stout, and true, and good
Yet live and are ready. Pilsdune and Leweson,
Winton and Sarum, and strong Camalate,
Mendip and Quantock heights, the Channel side,
Brecknoller and Brent-knoll, far through the glooming

Shout, "Wessex up and arm"!—The reflected fire
Streams over, looks up from Pedrida.—A lone man,
Lone in his watching sees the unwonted light,
Sees, and in bitterest agony fights hard
With conscience, hears her reproaches, deeply feels
For evil or for good how powerless,
Once, once so strong, and in his very soul
Bleeds for his people. He knows assuredly,
As though an angel in vollied thunder spake,
Odun his faithful Odun is beset;
Alfred cannot save him. Bitterly he
Looks back, he cannot weep, that fiery flame
Burns up all tears; his heart is agony
His mind, his soul, fearful, dreadful agony.—

Many and generous are the ardent cries
Of "Kynvit to the rescue"! Old age buckles
His rust-eaten armour, battered helms and shields
From the walls leap, and of themselves invest
Strong sinewy limbs; brown swords, broad axes glow:
Wessex with indignation trembling, longs
For warning to some tryst.—Wessex has felt
The conqueror's scourge, his torturing iron heel
Has crushed her into the dust, her children's blood,
Their red heart's blood up to pitying heaven shrieks,
And Scandinavia through her gloomy shores
In terror hears the rending moan, and shudders
Lest her own day of doom be come.—Yet her vile sons,
Her sons, the sons of all the vindictive North
Riot, yell, laugh, in their triumphant glee,
And carouse deeper to the feast of blood.

To them every beacon writes upon the sky
“Hubba has landed, Wessex is destroyed.”

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A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X .

BOOK THE FOURTH.



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A L F R E D

OF .

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E F O U R T H .

The Saxons attack the Danes, and having destroyed the greater number, return to Kynvit.

Lightly the angel touches them, and all
Collected, calm, refreshed, and vigorous,
From their hardy couch arise ; long 'ere Daglinger
Spreads his light haze above the eastern hills.
From on high invigorated, few words and low
Pass from lip to lip, but all speak cheerily,
Every foot springs forward lightly, and erect
In some proud consciousness every hero bears
A Victory on his crest : and every one
Is that glad hero, staid, staunch, and resolute ;

So goodly a brotherhood ne'er yet shone in arms.
In Odun's glance every stout warrior sees
Some strong, some high resolve; and, as the flash
Leaps athwart the gloom, and the whole cope of heaven
Is one instantaneous blaze, so that one glance
Has illumined every soul. As to the organ's peal
Kindred vibrations thrill, so to one word
Heads, hearts, and hands, and helms, and shields, and swords,
Respond. Or honour, or dishonour, death or life,
Are upon the issue, and they fearlessly
Stake life upon that issue; 'ere their chieftains
Assent have asked.—Assembled upon the dais,
Odun and all the thegns, he, as their tongue,
Their decision proposes: "Freemen, brethren all,
Brothers in arms, and hearts, and souls, especially
Sworn and true brethren, in this utmost need
Or of life or of death. The consummate warrior
Questions his danger, tests it's threatening,
Nor leaps he blindly over a yawning gulph
Taking his chance and tempting Providence:
We have so looked, and in it's open truth
Unvarnished, and unexaggerated, ask
Dissent or convinced concurrence. We have fought
As unflinching Christian men, but driven back
By weight overwhelming, here we lie shut in.
Our walls are strong, your hearts are strong, your arms
Will redeem the Pledge of your hearts:—So far we have
All manly confidence, and were this all,
Hubba, and all his friends, and all his fiends,
Might lift this fort, might hurl it into the sea,

But never stir one pulse. On the other hand
See this true picture.—We have food enough
Yet for one month, by care it might be eked
Some short space longer ; our kind, faithful dogs
And noble horses, yet might afford us food
If to such extremity driven : Heaven in it's mercy
Forefend us from such distress, as to devour
Those who have so truly loved us ; but of that blessed,
That wondrous fluid, which the God of heaven
Has fitted for every want, of man, or beast,
Or of vegetable life, we have little store.
Cut off so suddenly from the pure source whence
We drew supply, and from the river shut
By hostile ships, and the salt sea but mocking
The eye and the heart oppressing ; Save that our store
Of ale, of mead, would for a few days guard
Against the extreme of thirst, we are so bereft
As to be straitened now. Were we to yield,—
Question the opposite coast ; hear, hear that testify
To their utter want of mercy, their ignorance
Of that dear, that beauteous word. Death by the sword,
Or death by thirst or by famine, are for choice :
We, we have chosen the sword. Yes, we propose
Our way to cut through yonder opposing force,
Or in God's mercy, and I feel assured
Of his abounding mercy ; we shall strike
A blow every after-age will envy us.
What say ye ?—speak frankly,—death, or the hope
Of honourable life".—Promptly replies
Osmaer in arms long tried, after few words

With his compeers. "Knew we before ye spake
Earl Odun and ye thegns, that worthy deeds
Would worthily be proposed ; We with one voice
Ask life of God who gives life, willingly
Placing life in his good keeping : Where ye lead
We follow, and God speed us." "Brethren, ye have
Answered as God would have it. God has spoken,
Surely none other could have moved the heart
Of woman so to counsel.—Dear Ostrida
His honoured instrument has been to point
The strict stern path of duty. Welcome then,
Welcome be your decision : march we on
Even in His strength : ardent Victory
Shall around our White-Horse float."—With practised eyes
And active hands, all, their stout harness gird,
Poise their tough javelins, clench their axes tight,
Fill their capacious quivers, twang their bows,
Brace on their double-shields, and mustered stand,
Good men, all stout, all true.—Odun divides
Into eight bands the whole, to each, two thegns
Apportions : to one central host, in strength
Double to each, the standard broad commits
Waved by Æthelred war-worn ; whose sturdy arm
Had borne it in storm, or sunshine, peace, or strife
Throughout fifty summers ; now in severest fight
Meaning to defend it.—He unvauntingly,
But steadily determined, stands secure
In his remaining strength ; for he had never
Shrunk or cried "Hold." This, the selected band,
The household troop, Odun destines to protect

His daughter and her maids. Himself, with Thorkill,
Ceolmund, and Oslac, Ceadwalla, and Wulfstan,
Head on this warfare.—Instantly required,
The thralls at once attend ; so readily
To his loved summons wont were they to attend,
For that he had not, in the pride of rank,
Forgotten his stewardship ; and as kind office
And kindly return of service had not yet
Weakened attachment's bond :—with rapid glance
Scanning in a moment the events of years,
From memory's dawn to the last moment's breath ;
Wrestling with, keeping down the agony,
In calm, in subdued tone, he labouring speaks.
“ Wulfgeat, and all your friends,—in peace or war,
In peril or in comfort, ye have been
All as my children ; so your forefathers were
To my forefathers, happy be their memory
In this, and the world above. Unfree, ye have not
Been trained in the use of arms, so are unfit
For unrewarding strife :—Haply some may not
Care, though to none would I such thought apply,
To risk life in a cause which can but make
Ye thralls to them, or changeless to remain
Thralls unto us : then, freely as ye list
Go ; but, for often have we mingled in
Prayer, for our safety utter one fervent prayer,
Prayer not the less heard though from the poor slave's lip
To heaven it rise. Farewell, God speed ye all.”
“ Earl,” and the big tear gushes ; “ Wulfgeat, grateful
All his companions grateful, will not yield

Though we be thralls, to one of this goodly host
In fealty or in love.—To give us freedom
Is but a niggard gift, give freemen's weapons
And they shall prove, thralls can boast freemen's blood.
Doubt not courage or skill, brave Earl, but place us in
The full front of the battle, living shields
For thee and for our lady." Unsurprised,
Yet by such devoted spirit inly moved,
Odon had rather have grappled fifty foes
In the dark, the deadly gap, than with such friends
Enter upon a strife of love. He stands subdued,
Speaks not; when speaking, with strong effort speaks.
"I cannot brethren, place ye with ceremony
In the clear high-way, turn ye, bid ye speed;
But I can place ye on that hard high-way
Whereon honour welcomes daring travellers.
I know that ye are resolved, my soul relies
Upon your affection, your courage. Arm then, take
Your own post of honour, of confidence, be ye
Your lady's assured guard." Or skilled to strain
The sinew-trying bow, the axe to swing
On the monarch oak, or ash, loud thundering;
The mighty keel to frame, the ribs to bend,
In sylvan war the broad boar-spear to urge,
To make the forge-hammer on the anvil ring,
Freedom in an instant has warriors made of them.
Flocks, long accustomed to the shepherd's care
Are wavering, fearful, helpless, yet when lost
In the white mountain land, become resolute;
In martial order head the feebler ewes,

Loud stamping, threaten, and, the threat despised
Charge headlong, on or man, or hostile beast.
The timid hen, when of her brood in charge
Dares away scourge the raven : so, put in trust,
The weakliest is all strength, all heart, all soul :
Their leathern bonnets turn to iron helms,
Their woollen tunics to plated mail of proof,
From each belt of skin the knife, a broad sword clangs,
The quarter staff as a glittering spear becomes,
And, by freedom nerved, all in redoubled strength
Are giants who dare scale heaven.—Odun the Earl,
His o'erburthened heart relieves ; by looks, by words,
By hardy greeting, keeps emotion down
By ceaseless action : nor less his bold thegns
Look each to another's welfare, caution give
And kindly caution take.—Armour and weapons
All duly borne and perfected, the chief
Warns them to break their fast. “ The morning air
Bites cold, bites piercingly ; true hunters take
Wherewith to stay their strength ; the quarry is staunch
Arduous may be the chase, long it may be
'Ere our hot blood shall taste such cooling draught,
So pour we a libation.—God of Heaven !
Glorious Lord God Almighty ! in whose hands
Are weighed both death and life, as we partake
In strictest brotherhood the staff of bread
And the bounteous stay of water, and all other
Food, solid or liquid : O ! in thy mercy strengthen,
Sustain our arms, our hearts. Bowing to Thee
In lowliest confidence, of Thee we ask

Life, if life be for good ; or, if Thou seest
Death more to be desired, in Thy mercy
Lord God of battles ! grant Thy warriors
May sleep in a field of honour, and awake
In a glad realm of glory. Grant that our blood
May this soil so invigorate, that Wessex
Shall henceforth bear none but warriors, and in long,
In long, long after-time, may grateful eyes,
Weeping over our lonely grave-mounds, look on high
And say exultingly, " Here heroes sleep
God rest their souls."—Now brethren, to your food.—
With gay, with grateful hearts they food partake,
Sound and substantial, and refreshed, rise up.
They rise, every winding passage and deep vault,
And massive tower, and turret echoing,
Throb, as the very stone had gained a soul
Panting for victory.—Not less devoted,
With sedulous earnestness has Ostrida,
And far foreseeing care, in order due
So all things set that Hagbard within reach
May in long absence, find refreshing food
And liquid, more refreshing. Or the foe
May in Kynvit sojourn, or in God's good will
She may return, and 'ere Night's airy car
Shall athwart sweep in her eternal round,
Be in attendance, the bitter pang assuage,
Or cheer the reviving glow. Unconscious, he
Sees not an angel bending o'er his couch,
Hears not that angel fervent prayers repeat,
Marks not that angel, from her humble knee,

Rise up a Saxon warrior.—Ready stand
The skilful armourers : Her corslet shines
Rich in effulgent gold ; consummate art
Traced out the exuberant foliage, wondrously
Containing in each scroll, depicted feats
Of historic heroes.—From far distant realms,
Gained in some bold encounter, when Northern bands
Through Norva-sund in gallant state had sailed
And fed the hawks of the sunny clime with blood ;
From hero to hero passing, for lavish price,
Odun had purchased it, and as a due,
A welcome bridal-gift presented it
To Elfgitha, at their nuptials, tokening
That a Saxon wife ready to sustain should be
Her husband's war-toil, as to deck his couch
In halcyon days. Now, wondering eyes seek out
Each depicted circumstance, as that magic art
Had inlaid, and chased up the glorious work.—
Here, on the high-curved mound, Polyxena
Doomed, sinks before Achilles' shade : Laocöon
Here, with his sons, by strenuous snakes entwined,
So writhe in contortion, as that such terrible death
Were heroically lovely : Priam here
Sinks beneath a brutal warrior ; venerable
His floating grey hairs stream on the bloody floor,
Fury even pities such excess of woe,
And, melting in compassion, bends and weeps.
Here raves the prophetess : here Hecuba
Tears out her snaky locks, and, fixed as stone,
Stands, horror's image : Pious Æneas here

Upon his filial shoulders his sire bears ;
The fated hero-boy into the flame
For Crœusa looks : Here beauty's goddess smiles,
Here Scylla barks, and here Charybdis roars,
Here Dido sits a queen, and here she lies
Stretched on the funeral pile. Here Anna mourns,
Here swift-winged Iris clips the trees of life
Sacred to the infernal gods : Here Eurys rounds
His cheeks almost to bursting : Heaving aloft,
Or rolling, in the hollow sea labouring,
The fleet breast the billows, valiantly smiting them
As that Mulciber and his Cyclops monocular
Were Jove's thunderbolts forging : here, on their beam-ends,
Whirled as in a sling, groaning, creaking, splintered,
Into ocean's caverns they plunge ; but, gaily here
Lightened the wondrous vessels of their freight,
Laughing at gleaming swords, or burning brands
Launch off as lovely sea-nymphs gambolling,
With lithe limbs shooting through transparent floods
In the hey-day of youthful mirth :—Latinus throned
Here the pious man receives ; Amata here
Maddened by the Fury, shrieks, and shouts, and bounds,
And waving her blazing torch, the nuptial song
Pours to the woods, the winds.—Lavinia,
A beauteous heifer, prize for contentious bulls,
Disconsolate awaits her fate. Turnus here stalks,
Here offers Anchise's son huge hecatombs
To Gods propitious. Here the sanguine strife,
The lot of ages deciding, gives to the world
Chiefs of an iron race, of iron men,

Of iron arms, iron hearts, iron their souls
Long long to scourge yet to civilize.—So wondrously
Tells the gorgeous war-vest, tales which only one
Of the sons of Wessex can read.—Golden her helm,
Helm prize for hero-gods, equal in art
Enforces admiration, though of design
Discordant, as of different realm or time.
The visor, a female face, majestically,
Serenely beautiful, attracting yet repelling
Aught of evil, faultless as Tritonia springing
From the broad forehead of Olympian Jove,
Goddess of Wisdom. Alluring but too severe
Her toil-s^hewn path to after-death renown,
For any but noblest souls her smile to woo :
O'er the bright polished casque, on the right strive
The Lapithæ and the Centaurs, monsters rude
Staining the nuptial feast of Pirithôus
By unhallowed violence : slain and weltering,
By Hercules and Theseus, sorely they rue
The inhospitable crime. Upon the left
In intermingled fight, the Amazons
By Theseus are from Attica expelled,
Difficult his defence : streaming the garb,
Quivering the lance, the ringing of their shields
Imagination hears, and sees, and leaps,
And grasps defensive arms.—Beneath the crest
A dragon by a lion smitten down
Coils round the powerful limbs ; the roar, the hiss,
In the death struggle visibly audible.
Suspended by a glowing baldrick, richly

Embroidered in silk and gold, of Elfgitha's
Device and surpassing art, in a jewelled sheath
Hangs her blue battle-axe, tempered skilfully,
Hardest helm to cleave, or split through toughest shield,
Laughing to scorn all myotic Runic rings
By Lapland dwarfs, wrought in rugged caverns deep,
And dark, and fearful; with the fires roaring
And with their anvils clanging; tiny elves
Surpassing of cunning skill, surpassing of strength,
In malice far surpassing.—Her hunting-knife
Is eager to plunge into the red deer's throat,
And her tall ashen spear, light, strong, and tough,
Highly polished shines, as more for May-day sport
Than blood-spilling contest: yet the hawks of heaven
Sail in wild transport round it's beaming glance,
Prescient of food. Succinct, so far as pure
True maiden modesty can meetly bear
Their length to be reduced, her garments glow
Varied as the dove's neck glossily; bridal garb,
This her glad bridal day, to honour wed.
So shines Ostrida, as an angelic chief
Veiled in a female form were over earth
Breathing harmless lightning.—In her countenance
Honour and truth in radiant glory, subdued
By virgin diffidence, serenely smile:
Broad the rich golden locks, in gladsome waves
Kiss her warm cheek, and to the ivory neck
Tell their soft love-tale: So she stands or moves
As a seraph in her graceful dignity,
Or as the Genius of the Arts had striven

l with brass, even as Valkyries
eir brave beauty glow. Lovelily terrible,
s highest triumph, in his undiminished pride,
had hailed them as daughters. Never, never,
triad of beauty for stern contest armed
d from enchanter's castle.—Proud, their steeds
the dauntless maidens, and with eager heat
ing inhale the steam of the battle-field,
n for the clangorous trumpet.—Evenly
s, as phosphoric clouds, the armed bands
ling with spears ; and hoary Kynvit pours
a her joyous portal such heroic chiefs
ould o'ermatch the Argonautic host,
one a god.—The pale grey eye of morn,
broad, red bale-fire, the moon's silver beam,
s, glitter, glow.—Though oft have noble dames
ig in princely lustre, or nobles armed
sportive test, or priesthood, in priestly pomp
imposing pageantry, all sense enchained ;
never Saxon eyes have seen such worth
orthily enshrined.—As they had viewed
avenly vision, each in respectful awe
As his helm : honest manly tears roll down

“God save ye all”! replies. “His Providence
Shield us all in this day of trial.”—Ere Odun speaks,
In his full heart Ceadwalla, mournfully
Bearing his youngest born, whose laughing eyes
Dance in their gladness, and whose red cheek nestles
Into the throbbing neck; un-erect, unhelmed,
Stands before the noble Earl. “To say I grieve,
To say that my heart gushes hot tears of blood,
To say that I feel dishonoured when such strife
Calls to the ruddy field, and sees Ceadwalla
Languid and loitering, cannot paint my sorrow.
But the voice of nature pleads with forceful tongue,
I cannot quit my child. Pity me, yes,
Pity me, forget me. Better in untainted strength
Are ye, than having one more, half of whose heart
Elsewhere would be. No noble stone shall mark,
No swelling mound denote my humble rest;
Flat shall the sod be, and the child shall run
Unchecked by a laggard’s grave.”—Gloomily, vacantly,
The hoary warrior, bowed down by self-reproach,
Unsteadily totters. Heavily upon his child
Drops the big tear, and with his deep sighs mingle
Commiserating sighs.—“Not so, brave man,”
Grasping his pendent hand, Odun frankly cries:
“Loudly the harp shall ring; high the bard’s lay,
Careering in ecstasy, shall, years far hence,
Glad the dim shades of thy glorious ancestry
With Ceadwalla’s renown. Last of thy race,
Never shall ancestor have cause to blush
For thee in his airy hall. High thy grey stone

Shall be, whether Saxon or Cymry, in the pride
Of thy glad fame set it up. Maidens shall dwell
Rejoicingly on thine honour : matrons relate
Thy brave deeds to their sons : and warriors
From thy valour gain access of valour. Yon raised ground
Our field of glory looks over, witness thence
Who triumphs, who falls, and not a Saxon heart
But higher will beat in the proud consciousness
That a braver Briton his deeds will chronicle.
Cutha and Ceadda, with those noble hounds
Confused we shall but be ; stay with Ceadwalla :
And if the God of Battles in his anger
Should Wessex have deserted, refuge seek
With Hunbeam old.”—Sadly the brave chief turns,
Slowly, unwillingly ; grief-dimmed his eye
Sweeps o’er the misty waste, his rending heart
Heaving with agony, fain, fain would wish
Heaven had such trial spared.—Staunch, the strong hounds
Hang on the leash, Cutha and Ceadda hot,
Back throw their shoulders, obey, but impatiently
Chafe upon their anger.—The subsiding fire
Reddens less the clear, cold sky ; a warmer glow
Flecks the far horizon ; Hrimfaxi’s eager hoofs
Plash into the western wave ; the cold, cold dew
More chillily yet falls ; wary the chief
Glad in his band devoted, appointed well,
And by his bold thegns arrayed skilfully
Scans them then speaks : “ Brave friends, true warriors,
God has in his grace called us unto this task,
God will protect us, as we work his will ;

And that his will it is, some power, above
All earthly domination, tells my heart ;
And with that glad assurance, I rejoice
In your companionship. No priest is here
Us for our sins to shrive ; be they forgiven
Where alone forgiveness rests ; and, so forgiven
We, God's true soldiers march, only in his strength.
Of him have we taken counsel : As in his will
All man can do has been done : to his good mercy
Commit we now ourselves.—Dread, dread, Lord God !
Creator, and sole ruler of this world,
Of Earth, of men, of spirits ; here, before Thee,
Here, in the face of all the hosts of Heaven
Who love to look down upon thy glorious work ;
Here, in the face of all the angelic host,
Of all the spirits of just men, of all
Who in this poor distracted land yet draw
Thy breath of wondrous life, here we devote
Our souls, our minds, our bodies, Thee to serve,
Our country thus best to serve : Bless thou our swords,
Bless thou our Standard, bless us as warrior men,
Bless us as Christian warriors ; so protect us
As in thee we wholly trust.—Whether for death,
Whether for life ; in honour, in renown,
Save us or bid us die.—Before us, friends,
Faintly in the glooming, through the hovering mist
Rise their Standard, their dark tents : Those are our mark,
Strike boldly, strike only there.—Raise our battle cry,
“ God, and King Alfred ! Onward.”—Calmly, steadily,
“ God, and King Alfred” ! says each clear-toned tongue

“God, and King Alfred,” echoes Kynvit tower
“God, and King Alfred,” the deep silent sky
Utters as by angel lips.—Nor words alone ;
’Ere Odun and his bold peers, ’ere Ostrida
Girt by her generous guard, ’ere band after band
The wall have passed ; stern Abdiel and his host,
Stern now for war, dark browed as for close strife,
In effulgent arms irradiant the blithe air
Winnow with rejoicing feet. Spears, plumed helms,
Effulgent corslets, each a pure diamond,
And shields of sapphire orient, far shining warn
The fiends : they, shrinking, in confused rout
Contorted, and convolved, foul serpents vast
(So seen in the gaze of truth) on their spires roll
Into deeper, yet deeper shade.—The field is set,
Christian and Pagan meet, nor shall Hell-powers
The decision delay.—And the ascending sun,
And the pale moon, each from the verge of heaven,
Pant the conflict to behold.—Woe to thee, Hrafn !
Woe to thee, blood-woven standard ! Woe to thee !
Woe to thy witchcrafts ! Woe to thy sorceries !
Woe to thee, blood-stained Hrafn !—Onward the host
Move in their spirit, move in their confidence :
Good presage, presage too sanguine. Wide and deep
Yawns the huge trench, stretching it’s sinuous length
Each end buried deep in mist.—Wondrous the work,
Wondrous the workmen. For awhile they stand
Stayed, not confounded ; danger does but give
Strength such check to surmount : reliant upon
Heaven, they strive as men.—Backward their shields

Slung, and secured their weapons; resolutely
Retreat they, and by gigantic impulse strained
Trembles strong Kynvit: prone the outer wall
Falls, the earth burthening: in sinewy arms
Each bears a ponderous mass; as a travelling rock
Onward again they move, sighing the chasm
Groans beneath the arising causeway; the gods so
Bridged over Ifing, river of ceaseless wrath
Rolling in unsubdued enmity between
Godheim and Manheim: Gefione's ploughing so
Was followed by the impetuous ocean.—Few their words,
Too occupied for speech, onward they pass
Rapidly with measured step. Thick as a swarm
Of overgorged locusts, heap upon blackening heap,
Confused as they had reeling fallen, lie
Sea-king, and Vi-king, ship-swain, man-at-arms
In terrible unconsciousness.—Necessity,
Dire, dire necessity, with iron hand
Compassion's throb bars. Odun to his lips lifts
'The impatient trumpet; thrice does his lip, falteringly
It's office refuse; thrice does his hand, relenting
Powerless drop; thrice his thrice-noble heart
Had cried, "have pity."—The eagle from her height
Harks, the dark raven croaks, the ravening wolf
Howls, and the dreadful scene of unavenged,
Of innocent blood, passes in vision by;
Earth, ocean, every stream, and mountain red,
Red, red with fire, with bloodshed, cry "revenge";
And sternly, and anguish torn, convulsedly he peals
The Charge.—Harshly every trumpet peals,

y fierce warrior, in a moment fired
ounding shield strikes, and with continuous roar
d and King Alfred" ! shouting, on they relentlessly
e work of slaughter drive.—Spears plunging
e through the nearest: far and wide around
from their dream, or of gluttony, or blood,
ldered the staggering host.—As Surtur dark
the fiery world had burst, and Ragnarok
d twilight of the gods, had flooded earth
Asaheim with distraction: stumbling, fleeing,
or where unknowing, wildly they rush, or stand
stonishment stupified.—As sapling oaks
n down they fall; red life, and livid death,
other griping, struggling, and intertwined,
in the grave trampled.—Dim, in the mist
e and ferocious, gallop around the plain
on her coal black steed, in spectral light
and the Valkyries: so dreadful seem
maiden warriors. Grim, the demon-gods
unsustained rites now take revenge,
recompence exact.—Clang the trumpets,
at the heroes.—Hilda in maddening rage
es her shield; her wild, her dissonant throat,
s as a black torrent rushing: As the storm-ship
mariners fabled, the red bands, red
with but pagan blood, plough through a sea
uman life, a desolated sea
ng, and surging, howling in agony.
e fierce onset, cloven the standard shafts,
through the tent-cords, down the thickened folds

Fall ; and entangled, kings, and fore-castle men,
Ship-swains, and household guards, and redoubted earls
Inwhelmed with each other fight, each deeming each
A bitter, a deadly foe.—Surprised, astounded,
Yet greedy warrior still, bent to sell life
For it's worth in blows and blood, begun in blood,
Assured to end in blood ; with fortitude
Facing the iron shower, scorning it,
Joying in the song of spears, collectedly
Assuming his ringed mail, bracing his shield,
Towering in his gleaming helm, Hubba, striding, frowns
As worthy to be deemed a god ; more daring than
Even a god, he lifts the Remembrance cup
(Not wholly drained in their mid-night debauch)
Pledges the war, and draining it to the dregs
Bids the Christian dogs, "come on".—Around him few
Worthy of better fate, a faithful few
Range their long shields, and through the pelting storm,
The iron-hail of swift winged javelins,
Look eagerly for light, deeming that morning
Has not yet her curtains rent ; mist, hurtling weapons
So darken earth. Painfully eager he
Strives the field to over look. No standard marks
Where his vi-kings are camped, no tent points out,
Hrafn away has flown :—rolling, he rolls
In anguish his woeful eyes, fiercely his heart
Beats, as the heaving chest were all too small,
For it's torturing anger, as with vengeful brow
Daring the Powers of Heaven, he exclaims ;
"Shame on ye gods ! shame on ye, helpless gods !

Do ye desert me thus? thus, is it thus
Ye repay me for hecatombs, for Saxon blood
Poured out as water, for red-reeking shrines
Floating in the rivers of a hundred fights,
Each murderous, and each victorious? Am I now
To fall thus unfriended?—Go skulk, go hide, go cower,
Go tremble in your fanes; go, beg the fates
To tell ye your own fate. Hubba, henceforth
Disdains or other god than his own arm,
Or fate than his own sword.”—So, daring fate,
Onward he dashes; thickly hemmed around
Blind in hot fury, onward he presses still
Strikes but wounds not, overthrows but injures not,
By his friends guarded still, still he escapes,
Though every shield with barbs is bristling,
And javelins splintered, spears short broken off,
Onward he presses still, as the mad elk
Tortured, bewildered, strives to dash in it’s skull
And so end all anguish.—Thorkill, Tatea,
Ceolmund, and Wulfstan, in opposing strength
Meet him in his desperation. Hrafn had been
Steadily their lode-star; a thick cloud had hidden
From sight that guiding mark; slaying, still slaying,
Until of slaughtering weary, the Sea-king’s tent
Vainly had they sought, bent to eternize life
Honoured in glorious vengeance, or else to fall
Fit victims for fit conqueror.—Suddenly
Confronting though seeking, they pause as they had met
An enraged lion, shaking his flaky mane,
Mane as of horrent snakes, lashing aloud

His sounding sides his wrath to invigorate,
Though glaring as a seven-fold furnace, from fierce eyes
Blood streaming, pouring forth fire. As a bull
The path of a lion contést, the trembling ground
Paws, gores the shuddering sward, and headlong on
Launches his mighty bulk : full at the king
So flies an infuriate spear, rushing it bores
Fourfold the shield, of iron, of tough bull hide,
And of fir redoubled :—the dark blood it drinks,
With energy it trembles ; tenacious the shield
Upon the red fury gripes, or life had gushed
Out with the steaming flood. Active his hand
Athwart breaks the shaft, infixed the head he leaves,
And, bleeding, still fights on.—Whirling, his spear
Speeds as a meteor raging, yet it strikes
Erring the buckler. Thorkill stooping low,
O'er his broad shoulders singing it makes way
Into the heart of Raynier ; he with the pirate
Firmly had smitten hands, troth to maintain
Forward was he hastening, piteously he looks
At the spear, at his friend,—deep sighing, he sinks down
Slain by his brother in arms.—Each stung with rage,
Over his shield-fence leaps, as man against man,
Giant against giant, hero-god against hero-god,
Strives neither for a second blow. Off Thorkill shares
Of Hubba's shield a third, he valiantly
Thorkill's helm smites ; sloping the brown blade falls
Full upon the shoulder ; true to it's wonted trust
Repels the sharp edge that mail, but, rapid the weight
Through the limb jarring, down the benumbed hand

The true sword drops. Hubba, fierce Hubba, leaps
Forward at his throat, warily Thorkill swerves ;
Gripes he the ground, yet, active as Uller, up
Starts on the instant.—Rapidly the shield
Of Wulfstan thrown forward, loudly Thorkill cries
“Stand off, stand off! the demon is in my power
Envy me not my fame”: as with a falcon’s
Eye, with a falcon’s swoop, he snatches up
Hrafn the Standard, into the pirate’s throat
Drives the broad barbed head : downward the blow
Full between the connecting bones plunges, deep
Rending the panting lungs, piercing the gorged
Stomach, the spine it strikes : so, the steer fell
Veorr’s sturdy arm beneath : as speechless stood
Ymer in terror lest furious Elorrid
Should another victim seek. The faithful few
Gaze on the exulting warrior—he cries aloud
“Thorkill is now avenged, strong his right arm
Disgrace has thus wiped out.—Go, yelling ghost !
Go to thy kindred hell ; there learn that Heaven
Tenfold her vengeance stores for all who basely
The innocent destroy, by stealth destroy
Those they dare not bravely face. Were thy Valhalla
Aught but a priestly fraud, even then wouldst thou
Too vile be for the high, the heroic shades ;
And be driven out, thousands of years to float
In the howling, the wailing stream, stream all whose waters
Could not thy crimes wash out. Go, go and boast,
None but the Hrafn could have Hubba slain.”—
Vain his attempt to speak : Whistling the wound

Air socks, blood spouts : Struggling with death, high heaves
Labouring the chest : Striving to rise, the arm
Bends, for the task too weak : Still, still he strives,
And his face turns grimly towards his foe.
Hubba, so dying, even in death retains
Frowning his ferocity.—When a gallant ship
In the full fury of battle, every energy
To it's utmost tasked, man against raging man,
Tugging each for cherished life, either to slay
Or to avoid being slain ; when none regards
Other than his own opponent, suddenly
Sinks into the whelming wave, all eyes aghast
Gaze into the depth ; and, save the throbbing gasp,
All is silence intense : so o'er the listed field
Terrified astonishment, unspeaking, stands
At gaze on the chieftain dead, for whose fell grasp
Earth was too little, nations were as dust,
Kingdoms as small dust, thousands, upon thousands heaped
Were hecatombs insufficient. Torrent streams
Of slaughter slaked not his ferocious thirst,
Now a bare handful measures all that impelled
The revengeful demon.—Dreadful was Ella's crime,
Dreadful the punishment of such crime, born
To wade through a sea of blood. That scourge of fire
Has done it's fearful infliction : it is counted
Among those things which have been.—Conquerors !
Of mankind tormentors, of your detested selves
Retributive tormentors, on such horrible scene
Look, blush, and weep—yet for a few short years
Ye vapour, and ye are lost.—Silence rests not

Long on the terrible field, instantaneously
Man's anger does not die.—Curbed in, checked, chained,
Far recoil the demons ; yet Freya, rage-inflamed
Bids Horror the contest seek, bids her provoke
Renewal of the slaughter.—Pallid of cheek
With eyes out-distended, with disshevelled hair,
With garments rent and blood-dripping, harsh in voice,
Half paralysed in speech, the fury alights,
And as Hornklofi, wounded, fainting, flees
Outstretched her hands, trembling her failing limbs,
And before Haralf sinks :—he in extreme haste
Had veterans collected :—Long inured
To riot and indulgence, the gorging surfeit
So had not their senses chained ; but at his word
His potent word yet many had obeyed
And in incomplete order stood : “ Chief!—Haralf! ”—
Cries faintly the gasping wretch : “ Hubba is slain—
Hubba is slain—is slain :—Thorkill bears off
Hrafn—Hrafn—on, to the rescue, on ”—then drops,
Struggles, gasps, lies outstretched.—“ Men, to the rescue,
Men, to the rescue ” ; loud the Ship-Marshall shouts.
Shields in one mass, in one mass glancing spears,
Onward they press, to where Sigurd, where Hialto
Ruric, Helghi, Barco, Anlac, Thorolf yet
Around Hubba a corpse-ring form.—The iron tramp,
And the roaring hurrah, as deafening thunder-peals
Crash, roll, reverberate.—Thorkill amazed
Their strength computes, measures it leisurely,
And before the storm-cloud retiring, slowly falls
Back upon his unshaken strength.—Cheery their cheer,

Reiterate the Christian band their cry,
"God, and King Alfred" !—Yet again the yell
Of Hilda breathing out rage, breathing out fury
Re-echoes, the exulting fiend stalks, with terror
Floeing ; despair, and agony, and death,
Her shadows, following.—Ere in decisive boxing
Resolutely the opponents meet ; forward Earl Odun,
Oslac, and Ceolmund, their stout warriors
Bringing to the front, imperatively bids
Ostrida, Lulla, Leola, to restrain
Their impatient ardour : " Skill is useless here,
This is a trial of strength, where ye are, rest ;
We must receive their weight."—The wedge obtuse
As a dark dragon, sail and oar impelled,
Impetuously sweeps on. As the woodman's strength
Driving on, rives and tears the gnarled oak,
So in compacted might, almost irresistible,
Shakes the stern blow the Christian band throughout :
Yet far the pagans recoil. Tutored in war,
Onward they press, they charge ; so swift their onset
Boldly the corpse they rescue. Hrafn yet
Heavily falls and sullenly, with blood
Recking, rent, dust-defiled. Revenge, enraged
Sets her teeth fast : thick from the on-pressing rear
Sing sounding javelins ; stones, arrows, spears,
Missiles of every name, fall thick, fall fast,
Fall upon the Christians. Closely arched their shields,
Yet broader the shield of God's good providence
Off-cast them harmless, as a spring-tide snow
Heavy, in an instant melted. Upward launched

Up, up, into the sky, an arrowy storm
Downward swiftly plunges :—Vain or shield, or helm,
Charmed ring mail, or tough grey wolf-skin cloak ;
Stout Saxon bowmen and good cloth-yard shafts
Laugh them to scorn ; heavy with rapidity
Through shield, through helm, they drink the burning brain,
Or pierce the shoulders. Ruric the barb feels
Crash through his eye-ball, hold it's downward fall,
Rive the thin palate bone, nor it's speed stay
But in the gaping throat. Through Alfgeir's loins,
He forward driving, the descending shaft
As hell's vicious fury dropping from Lapland skies,
Buries it's thirsty length, the kidney's tearing,
The entrails piercing through, the bladder boring,
Deluging earth with blood and salt fluid mixed.
Twining, in thrice horrible agony, he falls
And blesses the friendly heels which crush out life.—
Through Barco's fleshy arm, at the elbow joint
Another drives, and in the forward thigh
As, rising upon the toes, he his whole weight bears,
Fast sticks, and tight pins him : With a downward wrench
Snaps he the shaft, but the hard-biting barb
Sidewise forced, tears through vein, through artery :
Forward he still presses, black and scarlet blood
Spirt high, and intermitting ; soon his noble heart,
Noble he is although found in such vile band,
Wrestles in vain against Hela : fainting he drops,
Gasps, and dies hard. Of noble, of royal birth,
His great-grandsire was King Eystein, Fortune had
Broken down his fortunes : Upon the ocean-wave

Sought he redress, nor though in such rude life
Where strife, where license ruled, ever had his arm
Injured or child, or woman. Life for life
Freely he proffered; as a warrior fought
Not as a murderer. Vainly his mother,
In the fond yearning of a mother's hope,
Weaves a broad cloak and kirtle, that her son
May in his glory look, aye be a king,
King of his own good ship. Her pale arm bends,
In her ear gasps a death sound, faintly a passing sigh
On the breeze mourns, and her poor heart sinks dead,
Presentient:—Low he falls, yet lives
Shrined in the respectful memory of those
Who, admiring could not imitate virtue; With these fall
Numbers of name unknown, or so defiled
As to disgrace all record. Such another
Fiercely stinging tempest, and this war-brotherhood
All will be brethrenless.—The front-rank men
Still pierce, still hack, still hew, still smite, still cleave;
Neither or yields or gains. Hurricane torn,
So a broad forest groans, and heaves, and sighs,
Wide waves round it's giant arms, lashes heavy and hard
Rocks, and far-trembling earth, yet the roots still
Cling more tenaciously.—While the fight thus
In it's high boiling fury, sways and surges,
Sorely are Ostrida and her maids beset,
Nor can one man be spared, ill to ward off,
Though Odun, though Oslac, though Thorkill, all have hearts
Half with her, half in the battle.—Steadily viewing
The fight undismayed, so Heaven their hearts has nerved,

to witness, to endure.—Maiden their spears
glitter unsoiled, yet all their clinging robes
are with blood saturate : So fixed they sit
as honour, and glory, and fate, (so had they seemed
to the pagans astonished, the death-dooming maids
rendered thus visible) here were presiding
over warrior's destinies, equally adjudging
souls to Odin, to Freya. Now it them behoves
Well to use spear and shield :—Onlaf and Hake
join the dark conflict, with a band unscathed,
ale and mead maddened. Unsubdued the fumes
of yesternight's debauch, they awaked have risen
as from the torpor of death, and scarcely know
not that they are in Valhalla, and the fight
that shadowy tournament. Hake is sister's son
to Onlaf, he of The Bull, ship stout and high,
king : her red prow, with bristling iron spikes
loping as a wolf-fence, girt. Sigrid his mother,
Sigrid the fearless, she in her lineage ranked
like the murderous Sea-king. Suithiod's King
rich and rapacious, dreaded the warrior strife
though sitting upon Odin's throne : He his court thronged
with warlocks and with buffoons, one to amuse
none to protect. As Hake, adventurously
baring his fortune, had on the Fyrisvold
cut down King Hugliek, crushed all opposing force,
conquered the kingdom of Odin ; so on the Fyrisvold
in stern fight with Eric and Jorund, sons
of Yngve, brave Alric's son ; of a mortal wound
lying, had his war ship with his dead men laden,

And, with their reeking arms, heaped on a pile
Of pitch-pine, flame-loving : the broad sail was set,
The rudder unshipped, and upon such altar stretched
Glorying, out he sailed : the wind off-shore
Urged on the flaming ship, and he went down
With his crew and all his wealth, as he dreamt, plunging
Into Valhalla. Onlaf childless, called
His sister's son his own, upon his brawny knee
Placed the new-born, water poured upon his head,
So making him proof against arrow, lance, or sword,
And naming him Hake, deeming that the soul
Of the name-father, into the child infused
Would make him a chief renowned : him then he fed
With a rabid wolf's broiled heart, smearing his lips
With the rich essence of such revolting food.
A Bersærker he became : at twelve years old
Two Bersærker men he slew, men strong and tall,
Ripping open their bowels. Onlaf the fearless boy
Loved, from that hour the wild whelp revelled in,
Aye in blood rioted. Hubba the pitiless,
Than Onlaf and Hake none ever dearer held :
Than Hubba these war-wolves none ever held more dear—
They see the maidens,—Plunder, lust, revenge,
All urge them on : no fear own they of gods,
Or Valkyries, or fates.—His deadly shaft,
Shaft which had never sped the same errand twice,
Strongly Onlaf throws ; and, or he measured wrong
His strength, or his distance, or Abdiel's potent breath
Abated its flight, it had slain. Truly it strikes,
Strikes directly beneath the breast ; there strikes, but falls

Powerless such beauty and such worth to wound.
In her might arising, hot the Saxon blood
Red mantling o'er her cheek ; no woman's arm,
A giant's terrific force hurls on that spear,
High tempered, keen, o'er the advanced shield
It passes and through the exterior muscle broad,
Which to the spine, shoulders and neck connects,
It bores, avoiding the collar-bone ; far spouts
Gore, as his own soul dark ; no generous, bright,
Rich, racy blood ; but as that fiends had seethed it
In a necromancer's cauldron : flying on
It pierces the bowels of Steinorth, and to the ground
Pins him as if impaled. Down had she leaped
Woman no more, but, in excited vigour
Vengeance in woman's form ; but Lulla, but Leola,
Both, at one instant, launch their angry shafts
Impetuous, aptly aimed : through the long shield
One passes, one there stays, swaying it heavily,
And in it's fury trembling : the unguarded pap
The other strikes fiercely, strikes but off rebounds
From the close-woven, ring-interlinked mail,
Against such assaulter proof ; yet the strength such
Of Leola's arm indignant, the blow beneath
Backward bending, well nigh he falls. Ulf, Ulfo's son,
Ulf the young armourer, by misery
Forced, his starving parents (bitter indeed that woe
Which the tenderest human sympathy overpowers,
And with it's torturing terrors sets a mother
Against her craving child) had to Heaven's mercy
Left their poor babes ; twins in ill fortune, as

Twain in their birth. Hungry the wolf, his ears
Pricked, blessed his ravening maw, and the tainted gale
Faced, though it almost stripped him. Voraciously
Snapping up the wretched heap of sordid rags,
Bearing them away, just had he covert gained
When Odun from chase returning, heard the rush,
Heard a weak infant's wail; harked on his dogs,
And, as in an instant, tight griped by the throat
Yelled out the caitiff wretch his ruthless soul.
Home borne, the infant boys well nurtured grew
Under his fostering into sturdy lads;
And Ostrida loved them; little matron she,
Proud of her babies, in their increasing strength
Had gloried, and yet felt sisterly delight
In her now humble servitors: nor less
Kindly towards their mistress glowed the honest youths.
Faithful as honest, Ulf had by her side
Slunk from the Earl, yet not in pallid fear
But in anxious dread lest injury should befall
Her his foster sister, for he knew her cheek
Never yet had at danger blenched whatever hue
It bore or appalling form. His ready hands
Had girded her corslet, borne her bickering spear,
Braced her effulgent buckler, led her steed,
Himself not less proud than the loud-snorting beast
Of such honoured charge: now, actively forward he
Springs half a spear's cast; swinging round on high,
'Ere Onlaf his poise can recover, that matchless sword,
Sword which in honour had hung in Kynvit's Hall
Two handed, heavy, and strong, and testifying

How vigorous the arm of Domnania's ancient earls,
Long since to their fathers gathered. It descends,
Shares half the helm, cleaves the far flying shield,
The whole staggering man benumbs: so huge the blow,
So swift, so ferocious, off close to the hilt
Snaps the brown blade; hurling the hilt in his face
He dashes the teeth out; retreating, then assumes
His fore-hammer, heavy weapon, loved and true,
And stands upon defence: the Bersærker,
Spawn of a fiend, not in revenge but lust
Of blood, still craving blood, impetuously
Rushing, raving, roaring, howling, bellowing,
As lion, or wolf, or bull, he had deemed himself,
Dances his frantic dance, gnaws upon his shield,
And with Ulf closes in.—'Ere Onlaf's spear
Half it's cast had traversed, Ceadwalla's anxious eye
Sweeping the field, saw the maidens in their strait,
Saw—the worn war-horse from his tether breaks,
Leaps the wide trench, scours o'er the slippery plain;
And, terrible in his energy, scanty armed
Confronts the adversary.—Cutha and Ceadda
Off cast their dogs; all, all, in equal speed,
Leaving the poor infant to befriend itself
Stoop with a falcon's flight: yet 'ere they range
Themselves by Ceadwalla, active wrestler,
Ulf has tripped Hake's foot, has whirled him off,
Has brained him.—Panting, he gazes upon the corpse
Strong knit, and sinewy, and of manly bulk,
Streaming, the fair hair dabbled with brains and blood,—
And draws a deep breath; "Good smith-craft that I trow"

Cries he exulting, "now, ye devils! on
And try your fortune again."—Nor lack they will,
Hiansen, and Kiort, Hardrada, Stufe, and Hrolf,
Klofe, Halstein, and Hako-svart, all warriors true
Though at first daunted, superstitiously deeming
That to attack the immortal maids were impious;
Into the conflict now rush sword in hand.
Onlaf, still bleeding, upon his red sword leans,
Strikes, and then leans again; as bites and kicks
A vindictive urchin, upon the ground dispread,
By a yet sturdier urchin; harm intending,
But to injure powerless.—Ceadwalla leaping in
At one sure blow through the ring-mailed-shirt cleaving
Of Halstein, harsh crashes the out-arching ribs
And broad-set shoulder blade, then, bursting through
The liver full-gorged, sets the hot stream of life
Free to escape. Essays bold Hako-svart
The grey-headed champion:—Cloven through the helm
Wide fly his brains, with ruddy blood inmixed:
Each massive stag-hound, at his utmost stretch
Gripes upon a strangling wretch; twisting, they twine,
Struggle, and in the death-grasp, strive as bears
To crush the enemy in; and if to die,
Not to fall unaccompanied. Desperately
They clutch, but the tighter clings each firm-set jaw,
Tugs, shakes, and throttles; clenches the teeth through and through,
Nor looses, until exhausted, quitting their grasp
The pagans lie stretched in their own blood weltering.—
Four now to four they stand, an equal fight
Save with Briton or Saxon, Saxon or Briton armed

In the cause of their Country, sacred cause to bid
The dead of all ages from their grassy graves
To start up and join in it.—Short pass of arms,
Swords, boar spears, and fore-hammer do their work,
And four griesly corpses fall.—Still the assault
Of both main battles roars. So strenuously
Ring the Cyclops upon their anvils, monsters huge,
One-eyed, and horrible, until with the clang
Vast *Ætna* vomits flame, and thunders shake
Heaven, and the solid earth.—Rapidly *Ceadwalla*,
Cutha, and *Ceadda*, and *Ulf*, their way hold on,
(The maidens safe from harm,) and by the rear
Enter the convulsed mass.—Earl *Odun* hears
Ceadwalla's voice, well-known, wondering hears
Yet with high pleasure; friendly greeting given,
Few words such warriors waste, the Briton tells
The prowess of *Ulf*'s young arm: blushing the boy
Hears his own praise, panting such praise to prove
Better deserved. “Let your strong thralls pass out
Thralls that they were, now men in their own right,
With their own weapons armed, fit or for war
Or peaceful labour: Let them, they trial craved,
Approve themselves well tried. Pleased the stout Earl,
Well pleased are all that hear:—the rampart opens
Forth tread they; confounded, the pale pagans stand
As though a mountain yeaning had forth poured
Giants, and dark genii, wielding sable fires
The condemned world to burn up.—Slumbers not *Ulf*,
Slumbers not *Ulfnad*, equally both armed
With ponderous hammers; *Wulfgeat* his broad axe

Strong tree-wright he well skilled in woodman-craft,
Wiolds : Hatte and Deorwys, Deorswythe and Weort,
Cutha and Ceadda ; these with knives and spears,
And Dikra, with his poll-axe, wont to strike
The staggering ox, dead : nor from the welcome task
Lag they a moment ; fierce and fast they strike ;
Shields split, and helmets ring : one confused heap,
Of armour, limbs, and blood ; gnashing, groaning, cursing,
Spread around they fall : wide gapes the threatening breach,
Wide, yet thick-set with spears, swords, javelins ;
No forest glade, with hazel clusters hung,
No emerald sward trailed over by dew-berries,
Tempting maiden feet through tangled grass to wade ;
But a vast shark's-mouth set with iron teeth.—
Bounding, as through a broken fence troop on
A gallant herd of deer, into that gape
Pour in the woodmen, Oslac, Thorkill, Odun :
All overspringing leaps Ceadwalla ; blazing his eye
The coward wretch has caught, whose red right hand
Caranmael slew : as the fat red-hart knows
The hunter has singled him, and into the herd
Dives deeper, so from the enraged warrior shrinks
And hides Haralf the murderer :—once so valourously
Bent to rescue a worthless corpse, now, now he flees
From a grey-headed man ; he winds, he doubles :
Useless or winding or doubling, or forward flight,
Furiously the staunch sleuth-hound springing at his throat,
Gripes hard, holds fast, nor slacks that vengeful gripe
Till livid, and bloated, eyes starting, tongue forced out,
Dead he drops, spurned : “ Die like a mongrel cur,

Die, rabid cur in soul, die and descend
Into thy kindred hell. Caranmael ! look,
Look, from thy height of bliss ; look down, and see
How thy son has avenged thee.”—Slowly retiring,
The sad chief in his sorrowing bitterness
Seeks a lone spot and weeps.—Broken their array
Fast retreat the pagans, faithfully bearing along
The Sea-king’s stiffened corpse.—Earl Odun checks
Avenging pursuit, even in so bad a cause
Generously the brave man respects fidelity
And away lets them pass. Droopingly they pass
Confounded, and shame-smitten, and confused,
Owing of life the miserable wreck
But to the mercy of men whom they thought to sweep
As vile things from the earth.—In his narrow house
Lonely lies the Sea-king ; slave, nor horse, nor hound,
Nor of all his coveted plunder, vestment, or gold,
His shivering shade attend. As he was born
So goes he back, to the dark, dreary vale,
By his own Gods rejected.—At Hubbastowe
Rises o’er his grave a memorial mound of sand,
Where, in years yet to come, the aged man,
Shaking his head in bitterness of reproach,
Shall, to the infant pointing it out say, “ there
Hubba the cruel Pirate, lies abhorred.”—

So solemn and so sad a melody
Never rose from battle field, as from that host,
Arising upon the wings of gratitude,
Seeks Heaven, and is there accepted.—Collected all,
And not one missing or scathed ; so visibly

Has God fought for them, that, with huge tears stealing
Down each embrowned cheek, each quivering lip
Reverently and secretly, to Heaven outpours
The overflowing heart.—With measured voice
The strain Ostrida leads; and every tongue,
Tongues many that never had sung melodiously,
Joins truly in the sonorous harmony,
As Heaven, for delight in holy, impressive song,
Modulated each to loftliest unison.

“ God has overthrown the mighty : God in his might
Has overthrown the terrible : He in his terror
Upon the haughty has trampled : He in his justice
The unjust has smitten down : He in his truth
His children has not forsaken : He in love
Has saved us, and in his mercy. God has conquered.
Yes God has conquered. Yes, his holy arm
Has gotten for us the victory : his arm,
His red right arm, the right arm of his wrath,
Into despair has plunged them : His glorious hand,
His merciful hand, the right hand of his love,
Has raised us up from consuming misery,
Has saved us in our utmost extremity,
Has, from the dreariest depth of wretchedness
Enthroned us upon his rock. To him be praise,
To him be honour, to him be reverence,
To him be gratitude, to him be love :
Love, gratitude, and reverence, and honour,
And praise, beyond all praise, be to Him for ever,
For ever, and for ever—for ever—yes—for ever.”
And, glorying the angels in such joyfulness,

Yet more intensely brighten, each brilliant one
In his exultation glowing more effulgently.—

Blood has required blood : All earth has cried,
Her streams, her fountains, and her rocks have cried ;
Each mountain, lifting it's awful hands to heaven
Vengeance has imprecated ; and The punisher,
Has trodden them down in his fury : blood has streamed
In recompense for blood : fire has devoured
In it's red-blazing wrath : fire has involved
In it's purifying wreath the demon fane,
And the idolatrous altar : yet has God curbed
His overflowing vengeance, lest that the land
Should be left without inhabitant ; lest that the pure,
The only faith, should perish amid the dross
Of polluting superstition ; lest from every hill,
From every grove, from every lake and isle,
To demon-gods revolting sacrifice,
Him should grieve, should pain, should insult,—Rolling in anguish,
In their foul forms revolting, of all guise stripped,
Flee the fiends scowling ; trembling, yet muttering,
Yet revenge threatening, by force or fraud.
By force most vain, by fraud yet possible.—

The owl, softly gliding upon her downy wing
Scarcely has floated to the cavernous gloom ;
Scarcely the lark his earliest lay has sung ;
Spring's gladsome flowers scarcely have shaken off
The dew-drops from their eyes ; 'ere clashing shields,
'Ere streaming banners broadly wave on high,
'Ere in the sun's red ray bright armour glances,
'Ere cheering voices thundering along each vale

Answer the bale-fire.—At her utmost speed
From dreary moor, or heath, or hill, or vale,
Tramps Domnania to the rescue: but to find
Kynvit delivered, paved the reeking field
With hideous faces, yet ferociously
Staring at the clear, cold sky.—In chastened pride
Looking round they wonder, in awe witnessing
The terrors of Heaven's judgment.—High the hawks
Wheel in wide-curving circuits; hideously
Ominous the raven upon the tainted gale
His fearful death-croak utters; to the sun,
High mounted in her pride the eagle screams,
Gathers a tempest in her giant wings,
And to the banquet hurries. Nor wife bereaved,
Nor desolate virgin, tasking her withered strength,
Nor duteous child, in wailing anguish scoops
The narrow eternal house. Enemies' hands
Fill the deep trench, the long Ship-mound pile high,
And in their sobered sorrow towards heaven look
And say "God rest their souls." Who shall gainsay
The charitable prayer?—In Kynvit hall
Thanksgiving loud resounds; in Kynvit bower
An angel watches by a dying man;
On Kynvit's height the gallant White-Horse floats
Triumphing over a drooping, blood-drenched flag;
On Kynvit tower, an aged warrior stands
Twining his fingers in an infant's locks,
Darkly gazing upon the ocean: Wild he hears
As from vast Snowdon's top, a bitter curse
Stream on the moaning blast.—Lone, one lone bark

mbles beneath it's fury—the lone bark
lim, drear distance fades—No mariner heeds
where that vessel drifts or where she sinks.



A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X .
BOOK THE FIFTH. .



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

*Michäel and Raphaël are sent down to Earth, and
observed by Satan, who proceeds to counteract them.*

Calm, clear, pure, holy, from impearled plain,
Thick strewn with living stars, irradiant
In bursting beauty ; calm, clear, pure, holy,
From swelling hill, deep tressed with waving bowers,
Rich with balm-breathing bloom, balm-breathing fruit ;
Clear, calm, pure, holy, from pellucid moat
Of orient sapphire ; holy, calm, clear, pure,
From silvery stream, from lake of golden sand,
From river, bay, sea, ocean, translucent
As liquid diamond, ambrosial mists

Clustering their serene wings, gently descend
In gleaming, conch-like dew drops, each the minutest
Gradually raising the choral song
Of sweetest melody, as joyous heaven
In heaven had waiked jubilent. And, joyous heaven
So jubilent has waked, long 'ere heaven's dawn
Has from the foot of heaven's cloud-veiled throne,
The only period of repose in heaven,
Bathed in ever-virgin effulgence, gloriously
Out-peering myriads of earthly suns,
As earthly suns in fullest meridian blaze
Out-peer yet nascent orbs, pale struggling
Through feculent earthly mist. Pure, praiseful thanks
Rise not alone from heaven's all animate
Ocean, and living land: exuberant life,
Exuberant light, exuberant brilliancy,
Glow in all faultless forms: Angelic beauty,
Seraphic grace, cherubic dignity,
And archangelic majesty supreme,
Float in the blithesome air; with measured step
Pace the enamelled mead; or, ranged in rank,
Each with his living harp, and living song,
Ready to pour forth his tribute of rejoicing
On the rejoicing breeze, which gaily fanning
Their ardent brows, with their rich tresses mingling
In sportive dalliance, steals, and scatters around
Ever-living incense:—So, expectant wait
The heavenly host, entranced in expectation,
Each diffusive of his joy.—From every sphere
Of glad creation's inconceivable immensity,

Out-poured as light, only out-bounded by
God's own infinitude ; from clouds of worlds
Instinct with suns, and circling planets, and moons,
In their order attending, spirits ministrant
The awakening note await.—Subdued, The Light,
To which all other light were darkness intense,
Increasing upon itth increase, effulgently
In sustained splendour glows.—One choral shout
From the encircling thrones ; one choral shout
Peals from the angel multitude ; diadems,
Palms, sceptres, every mark of dignity,
Overspread the crystalline pavement : cowering wings,
And hands upraised, the excess of light attest
And the fervour of adoration. “Thou alone,
Thou, thou alone art holy ; thou alone,
Thou, thou alone art pure ; thou, thou alone,
Thou, thou alone art good : in thee alone.
We live, we will, we act ; in thee alone
Living, we really live ; in thee alone
Willing, we rightly will ; in thee alone
Acting, we act efficiently ; thou alone art.
Within us, thou around us ; but for thee
We are as nothing :—For our creation, we
Praise thee for ever ; for the joy of life,
The joy, the bliss of ever serving thee,
Praise we thee ever : for our sustenance,
For our protection, for the uses thou
Makest of us, else useless else valueless,
Bless we and praise thee :—holy ! holy ! thou
Only art holy” !—And the Holy One

Bliss in their bliss, rejoicing in their joy,
Ever their blissful joyousness enhancing;
With him, all in spirit commune, and with each
He holds communion.—As on this joyous morn,
To measure time in heaven by times on earth,
Ascending in his own supremest might
After abased sojourn, in man's form
Man to instruct, to rebuke, and by keen suffering,
Keen spiritual suffering, man lost
Man self-destroyed, self-outcast, to redeem,
God his throne re-assumed: on the right hand
Of God, the spiritualised form of man
United in Deity mysteriously,
Sat down for ever.—As on this joyous morn,
God's own irradiance, yet more irradiant spread,
God's own glad glory, yet more gloriously
Glowed throughout all creation, as his mercy
Yet brighter shone than his justice, and his love
Shone through his just abhorrence of man's sin,
And triumphed in his son, his own beloved,
His co-existent son, death's conqueror,
Man's brother, man's redeemer.—On this morn,
Amid the attendant spirits of every world,
All of joy redolent, and peace, and love,
Hastening are seen the spirits of this Earth
Up from the depth conveying duteously.
Tidings of import, on their burning brows
And cheeks, speed-flushed.—Backward, in order wheel
Multitudinous the hosts, on either hand,
Anxiously in silence the blest watchers, greeting

With looks, not words.—With instantaneous step
Swift as direct, they pass the crystalline road,
And, on the threshold kneeling ; shield, and helm,
And gleaming spear from heaven's own armoury,
And armour of completest proof laid down,
They, but with eyes abased, and tear-suffused,
In confidence meekly bow ; and, heaven-sustained,
Conscious that God foresaw, foreknew, forewent,
Their extremest speed and tiding :—Worshipping
Aside they stand : deep silence, motionless
With expectation, o'er the myriad hosts
Inaudibly breathes.—“ Son, ever-beloved son,”
(And the calm, the delicious, the enhancing harmony
Sinking in the in-dwelling sense, each purest spirit
The gracious utterance drinks, upon which he lives.)
“ Only beloved Son, incarnate Word,
Thou one in me, with our co-eternal Spirit
One in ourselves, but how, un-eternal beings,
Our creation none can know.—Thou, by whose might,
By whose wisdom all perfect, far-foreseeing all
Beginning, all end, all cause, all consequence
Intimately knowing ; each complexity
Of bearing upon, of relation each to each,
All the wide sea of creation's countless worlds,
Were from blank nothing called up, and in whose love
All, in wide-circling orbits duly move,
Mutually subservient ; duly working out
Our sovereign will, each creature's ultimate,
Happiness, never-decreasing : by whose power,
The vindictive Accuser, in his strife to mar,

To achieve our ruling is made : and by whose pity,
Whose pitying affection, yet sin-scorched Earth
Dost live, breathe, yet in a peace's peace
Chastened within the bosom, live from above,
Nationness impetuous, born dearly saved ;
How dearly, and with what anguish, even this host
Of these thy glorious creatures, vainly seek
To know, to live in, yet can never comprehend.
Attentive, these our watchers duly have discerned
A furious strife, and, to their faint sense,
An imminent danger, lest that the evil race
Who over the ice-bound North yet hold their sway,
And, by blasphemous, veteris induce
To love their pitiless, their destructive rites,
Should, in thrice-maddened fury, yet prevail
The true faith ; albeit dimmed and sullied by man's craft
And by lying fables, cunningly devised,
Of Satan and his ignorant instruments,
(Fit tools for guide so expert in sophistry)
To root up, to expel, to scatter wide,
From that war-ravaged isle, where righteous rule
And manliest freedom, in yet distant time
Shall, by example, all earth purify,
And to the realm beloved thy people aid,
Where they shall ever reign, until the glad,
Glorious hour, when sin, and death, and hell,
Dragged along behind thy triumphal chariot-wheel
Shall be for ever bound, in darkness, in chains,
Inexorably bound ; and at these feet,
All rule, all principality, all power,

Meekly laid down, thou, at this dread right hand
Shalt for ever rest, and in eternity
God shall be all in all :—let Michâël
Isrâël's prince, let Raphaël, friend of man,
Speed with most instant speed, sternly to curb
The emboldened fiends, and without forcing, teach,
Sovereign and people, duty's dangerous
Self-rewarding, rigid path." Forthwith replies,
Reverent in tone, reflecting beaming love
In the Father's likeness, the irradiant Son,
Incomprehensibly self existent, yet by him,
In him, and with him living ;—"Father ! thy counsel,
Thy word, thy will, is mine : truth of thy truth,
And mercy of thy mercy, righteousness
Of thine own righteousness, cherished peacefulness
Of thine own peacefulness, in due time revealed
To man, to my brother, in his flesh one with him ;
Sinless, yet suffering, but him back to lead
Unto thy righteousness, still gloriously
With thee ever ruling : knowing what man is
In mine own self, his frailty, and how strongly,
And artfully, the malicious tempter can
Assail, allure, would deceive : thy ardent love,
Thy pity, thy compassion, in me live
As I in thee, and towards my fellow man
I yearn as thou dost yearn ; thou for thy creature,
I for my brother : be it, as in thy counsel
Thy word declares : and, thou, enlivening Spirit,
The Comforter, the Guider to all good,
Shalt sanctify, shalt strengthen this our aid."

So in their inmost communing, unheard,
Yet known by its manifestation, the all-merciful
All-holy Creator wills.—Far from within
The glory ineffable, the primal light,
Centre and source of all ; of all that was,
Of all that is, of all that ever shall be ;
In splendour restrained, yet in a form defined
Such as angel sense can bear, firmly, majestically,
Serenely advances, in his redeeming might
Gracious the Son ; by cherub wings upborne
Wide-stretching, vast, with starry eyes overspread,
Each in itself a sun, dark yet, yet meaningless
The Eternal Splendour beneath ; alike overspread
Each, with tongues that utter, as with prophetic fire,
Melodies entrancing ; beauteously blended sounds
Of loveliest harmony ; answering, as the wheels
Cry to the blazing pavement, while they roll
Onward instinctively.—“All glory be
To him who was, who is, who is to come,
The dread Lord God Almighty ! who has redeemed
The penitent, but will not in his anger spare
The obstinately guilty :—Worship him,
Worship the Lamb, who yet was slain for men
From all eternity, yea worship Him. !”
And yet again, censer, harp, palm, diadem,
Glow on the crystal plain ; and yet again,
The elders, all the principalities, the powers,
Cherub, seraph, angel, ministering spirit,
Heaven’s air, land, water, the infinitude of worlds,
All that has life, and all that for life pants,

g the gladsome shout, through all space peal :
and honour to Him be, who sitteth
his right hand for ever : glory to him,
born, who outcast, by his fellow man,
his fellow man, in constant love,
intercedeth : glory be to him,
and ! the Incarnate ! the Father everlasting !
Prince of Peace" !—Beauteously, benignantly,
ple brow serene, expanding wide
beneficence and throbbing love,
lcyon lightnings, beaming from his eyes,
breathing in his smile ; holy, the throng
upon his gracious words : as yet on earth
: sweet, silent, sequestered forest nook,
n, unsullied by the world's rude touch,
ruth, drink wisdom, from blest virtue's lip.
iel, whose prowess in that extremest strife
in, new-born, made the host of heaven ashamed ;
ide, unthankfullest, from glorious seats
down the third of spirits to the depths
ery uttermost ; to thee rank has given
heaven's warriors leader : ardent prince
ny nation, the chosen ; yet thee awaits
r, and worthiest service : speed thee hence
ny select compeers ; 'ere yet the sun
the northern region feebly dawn
loved earth, be thou with instant aid
all prompt thee, to the frail, yet good.
f my infant people ; be thou firm,
l, be vigilant ; thy wisest might

In this strife may be tasked hard, for thou must save
Not wreck the world, in such severe contest
As once had almost wrecked this stable heaven.
Raphaël, kindest friend of mortal man,
Upon Michaël's footsteps wait ; to thee is given
Charge to invigorate each spirit, ministrant
To every Christian man, but more especially
That man to cheer, who now, as David beset,
Need has of David's faith : speed ye with speed
Ever am I with ye."—As the gracious words
Sink into each bosom, the revolving orbs
Instinctively recede ; rejoicing acclamations
Float on ambrosial zephyrs, wondering love,
Love, some stupendous deed ever revering
Of purest mercy, for an instant stands
In gratitude transfixed.—Swiftly then hastens
Their well considered march.—Onward the select,
Strong-knit and tall, each as in himself a god,
As gods under gifted sculptors grew in gold
And sacred ivory, until worshippers
Shrunk from the awful gaze of him they had made,
Conception superhuman shadowing out
Of superhuman might and attribute ;
In regular measure move.—Reaching the bank
Of the bright stream, which from the mount of God
Flows over amber rocks, and corallines ;
One gliding mirror, clear, and pure, and fresh ;
Lave they their polished limbs, and glowing plumes,
And preen them for their journeying ; on no bland
Relaxing sport, though as a duty, joyous,

elf sweet, how dangerous soe'er.
well they know, how once, in serried fight
hell's dark legions, armour of fullest proof
availed them. Purified, made clear
ightest moisture, forthwith glad they seek
Tree of Life, whose renewing fruits abound,
leaves abound, the one all wounds to heal,
other the fainting senses to re-fresh,
with heavenly sustenance the soul to fill ;
nance which will not fail 'till their return,
though or distant may their voyage be.
sed thus, refreshed thus, on they nimbly tread
ron way between the brazen mounts,
ome whereon the prophet saw drawn out
ot, and horse, and warrior, all as of fire ;
he celestial armoury, arranged
der readiest. Each his armour knows :
all-during armours, as of instinct rare
their forms heroic, spears of arrowy light,
ds each a dazzling sunbeam, gleaming shields
ig or orbed, as for onset close
r reposing shelter, firmly grow
ich giant arm attached. Legions, in artful
gth and impregnable, in lengthened line,
ent, or circle, or square, as best is deemed
by it's captain, in expectance stand
r awaiting. Raphaël alone,
in his sacred trust, goes all unarmed :
e flowing robes, with modest gold here decked,
by a diamond cincture aptly restrained,


And a slender sceptre, with a lily tipped,
Distinguish him :—their great chief Michâël,
In panoply stands armed : divine the work,
Clings, moulded to his form, and yields, and curves
As slightest motion needs, as it were one
Even with himself : sun-broad, his ample shield
Blinds as the torrid lightning ; in it's midst
A blood-red cross, celestial ruby, streams
In terrible glory ; the all-girding verge
Woven with thorns, apt semblance of his service,
Messiah's own warrior marks. On his beaming helm
Sits Grace, sits Truth, sits Mercy, sits Righteousness,
Sit Faith, glad hope, and melting charity,
Fretted in diamond or frosted gold.
Arching the plume, light-tinctured, streams afar
One brilliant aurora : from his tall spear's point
Flees shrieking Fear ; and Terror and Dismay,
Ten thousand leagues at distance, shivering spread
Imploring arms, and scream in agony.
Off from it's wonted rest, all-confident,
Reaches he the Sword of Truth ; truly had it served
It's master in extremest peril, when
Thick girt by foes, all griesly, all enarmed
As with hell's own flames malignant, fierce, devouring,
Strong in it's wielder's strength, on either hand
Swiftly it descended, as when the husbandman's
Well-practised arms, with swinging flail spread wide
The autumnal chaff. Even with a warrior's love
Keenly his searching eye the length pursues
Of the finely-tempered blade ; with a warrior's joy

There, in recognition, he the memorial finds
Left by that sturdy stroke, which, cleaving through
Helm, shield, and armour, sent the howling fiend
Shuddering amid his legionary fiends
From the pursuing wrath. Now, strongly girt
Around his muscular loins, blithesome the brand
Longs such stroke to repeat: no second blow
Then shall be needed; when in coercing chains
Shrieking, and blaspheming, scared the Adversary
Writhing, and heaving, as volcanic fires
Upheave, and contort wide-rooted continents
Shall, bound in burning links, with wrath inwoven,
And fury, and unforgiveness, agonized twine
For ever.—Preluding their venturous march,
All, on their knees low bending, silently
Each in his own bosom and all in unison,
In their faith pray for aid: “All holy God!
Creator, sustainer, guider, dread preserver;
In this thy service, save us!—on our arms
In thy might sit, and with thy terrors make
Nerveless thy foes; us, in our need sustain,
Us nourish in enduring confidence,
Us suffer not in extremest strife to exceed
Their needful punishment. Ever with us
Be thou, and ever may thy warriors
With thee live, and in thee live.”—Onward set out.
Glowing the long-drawn line; pennon, and flag,
And gorgeous standard, flaunt the awakening breeze,
And, in sweetest harmony, the measured tread,
Echoing responsive, the re-echoing road

Trembles their march beneath. One line exact,
One length, one depth, one step, one living mass,
As of one soul on they move. On either side
Hemming their track, slight, stripling cherubs on
Their order with instruction dwell, not envying
Their honour well deserved, selected from
All of heaven's host to be on service sent,
But in their glory glorying, and elate
With gladness rejoicing in their joy sublime.—
Their instantaneous speed, instantaneous
As swiftest volition, has to the confine of heaven
Brought the obedient host, confine so termed
As the more compact orb enlimiting
Of ever eternal light, whence around, clouds,
Masses, or nebulae, as mortal men
In their puny, restricted minds enclasp
Works of infinitude; whence all around
Move in majestic curvature fulfilling
Gloriously their gladsome part; His highest will
Evolving. Though that here centralized light
Seem as an orb, above, beneath, around,
Rays of the subtlest essence permeate
All the wide fields of space, enduring not
Void, every where all filled, all vivified,
All throbbing with, all in bliss revelling.
Here, for the instant of an instant, they,
That day of wrath recal, when, in might throned,
In his own might, and in his own fierce wrath,
From the bright-shining lands Messiah thrust
Satan with his rebel host, and Michaël

Hurried their legions, as the falcon hurries
Upon the culver's track ; and, with one shout,
Of "Glory to God in the highest" ! on they sweep
With wings majestic.—All surrounding space
Vibrates in unison : no orb but feels
Impulsive the wave : though lessening, lessening still,
Yet in all sensible. In vain does mind
Heap league on league, million to million add,
Their march to sum. Straitened, no finite soul
The infinite can grasp, and mete it out,
As God did in the hollow of his hand,
When, in the plenitude of time, as time
Is in eternity, He spread around
In his goodness overflowing, orb on orb,
System on system ; floating, atomic mists
Each atom in itself a world, each capacious world
In itself but an atom.—To revere, to adore,
Is man's prerogative ; to know, is God's.—
Nor is their impulsive flight only heeded by
Unanimated worlds. Roaming around,
A wanderer and a vagabond, outcast
Of heaven, broken loose from hell, on earth
An abhorrence, and a hissing, and a scorn,
Bearing his own hell in him, and about him ;
An afflicting torment, a curse, an agony,
Self-tortured, self-accused, self-condemned,
Yet, proudly championing upon his bitterness
As a strong steed reined in, sullenly, vindictively,
Maliciously paces, height, depth, illimitable,
The Evil-Spirit. He, nor rest, nor ceasing,

Of inmost weariness, of inmost woe,
Knows, cares for, or seeks :—woe, pain, and weariness,
In scorn called his pleasures, malice his fierce joy,
Degradation his proud scoff. Gloomily he strides
Wan, haggard, threatening ; bewildered Horror
Flees from his dreaded step ; wailing Anguish gnaws
Her own flesh in his trail ; beneath his scowl
Whole nations wither ; war, famine, and disease,
Loathsome plagues and pestilence, corroding pain,
And utterest, utterest wretchedness, and death,
Stark, livid, pained, agonised death,
Stream from his blasting glare. In him, with him,
Life dies, death lives.—Well known the dreaded wing
Instinctively, of Michael, he discerns.
As serpents flee the crested vulture, so instinctively
Satan had fled : but tormenting anxiety
Holds him in thrall.—Wherefore this ordered march ?
And whither bound ? Has then the time arrived
When he and his, from beauteous earth outchased,
From it's ambrosial air outchased, ambrosial
To hell's compared, shall, shrinking from deserved,
Self-courted doom, in penal fire be pent ?
Of import momentous, deeds must surely attend
Upon such an exploration.—Dares he not
As once upon the Angel of the Sun, he dared
Deception to attempt.—Fervid, that glance
Fears he, as once he knew the cleaving edge
Of that meteorous brand. Scorns he to flee
Dreads he such foe to meet. Resolved, in haste
He from gross vapours rapidly involves



form in mail adamantine. Helmet, spear,
sword, and thrice threefold his shield, at once
e thigh, and head, and arm :—of warrior mould
stic, dauntless, proud ; in his high bearing
fars, or as Moloch, or, now meeter far,
'hor, or ferocious Odin ; on he stealthily,
contemptuously moves : hardily to dare
yet again, should war be policy,
ic to avoid the last, the worst resource,
emons as of kings.—On the softened edge
ight, he lurks, and steals, and glides along
diffusive vapour, scarcely of night,
not of day ; and thus the distant rear
s of their march : easily thus to track
ps which, all fearless, seek nor blazing sun
ling, nor deepest midnight's black abyss
rein to avoid a foe : as free to pass
y through gloomiest depth of Tartarus
x thronged with fiends, as in cohort compact
old watch at heaven's gate. Nor by him alone
d is the hastening legion : as a swarm
g all space, thicker than fire flies glancing
the odorous breath of Hesperus
adian climes ; more rapid, more innumerable
blithe ephemerons, on gauzy wings
lling through summer days ; even than motes
e gay sun glittering ; myriad upon myriad
piritual essences, glide, float, dart,
nent in haste ; or on enquiring wing
d, watch the holy messengers : unwont

Such warlike array to meet, such weapons rare
To see in effulgence, and such banners dazzling
World wide to stream, tinging with roseate hue
The ethereal splendour. As the microscopic sage
Wonderingly finds, each the minutest drop,
Instinct with else invisible being ; spirits so,
See the interminable, and uncircuitable,
Realms of infinity, peopled redundantly.
With material or immaterial life, and all
Mutually conducive to supremest bliss,
To the full of each capacity ; save where
Sin, from that dew poison elaborates,
Whence Virtue honey educes.—Or from yon Earth,
Wondrously wheeling in continuous curve,
With inconceivable energy, still stream
Spirits to Paradise bound, each with her guard
Of angels ministrant : and, numbers, bound
In bonds of desolation, of dreariness,
In terror, in suspense, sit brooding deep
Upon vices, crimes, and sins, each starting up
A vindictive cockatrice, to sting, and sting,
Torturing, not destroying :—others on voyage
Distant and joyous, of o'erflowing love ;
Bound to communicate knowledge or receive,
Delightedly seeking into marvels new,
And marvels infinite, meting irradiant suns,
And planetary worlds, and placid moons ;
Scanning their laws, in calculations high
Ascertaining their action, and re-action each
On it's adjacents ; they, as gratefully

Holy influence returning, systems wide
Influenced by, and re-influencing systems wide ;
All, in their independence, still depending
All upon each part, each part upon the whole,
Until, lost in astonishment, they only glow
In admiration, and in love supreme
To Him, who as in an instant called that whole,
In it's most perfect beauty, into being
Who bade it be, it was, is, still shall be.
Or others thread the maze of rainbow light,
Float in the varied hues of fervid suns,
Note, and search into the pregnant influence
Of colour upon colour, light upon light,
Shade upon shade ; or, penetrating into
Each perfect sphere, new natural systems see,
Yet each from all others diverse, still the best
And there, intimately adapted to produce
Happiness the most beneficent : others sail
On the broad volumes of mellifluous sound,
Seek out the qualities of melody ;
And in one choral, one harmonious shout,
Hear all rejoicing : no, not a balmy fruit,
No, not a flower, no, not a pearled shell,
Nor lichen, nor moss, nor tree, nor meanest worm,
Nor fish, nor bird, nor beast, nor man, nor spirit
Sublime in mysterious power, spirit to dive
Into the source of creation, spirit to soar,
Dazzled yet persevering, still to soar
Up to, and worship at the footstool dread
Of the Author of Creation ; but some spirit

It's uses or it's beauty, strives to grasp ;
Yet, overmastered by the search, sinks down
And humbly learns how far all search beyond
Are His mysterious ways, whose simplest works
Baffle the most gifted being fully to know ;
Known by Him only who made them.—All these powers,
These ministering angels, these sons of light
Greeting, are greeted by the warrior host :
Those in their brethren's glory glorying,
And these exulting, in such wise, such peaceful,
Such love-producing delights.—So pass they on
Blessing, and so return the bliss they give.—
At length, upon the utmost limit, they
Alight of that oceanic fluid thin
Around the rugged earth and salt sea vast
Conglobed, firm ground to them ; thereon they rest,
Re-adjust their arms, and preen their plumed wings,
For fresh exploit.—Now, through a denser tract,
Their way to force against natural ascent,
They from the pure into the impure dive
The yet more impure to reach : their eyes awhile
Wander around the waste illimitable,
Tinged with bright hues iridescently beautiful ;
Region where mirthful meteors weave the dance
In orderly disorder, frolicking,
Whirling their streaming banners o'er the sky,
Girding the zenith with a diadem ;
And now, below to the opaque directing
Admiring sight, as from the earth yon moon
Seen, when half turned his face. Mane rejoicing

Gazes back at his lovely sister, furiously
Pursuing him through Ginnungrgap, abyss
Æthereous wherein, of Ymer slain
Compacted the Earth, was by the holy gods
Suspended, and the heavenly vault bedecked
With wandering, with fixed fires, above, below
The rugged ball, then desolate, then void
Of life, or living thing, or man, or brute,
Bird, fish, or insect, or forest, herb, or moss,
Or earliest efflorescence : these, with the sun
And with the moon, he to distinguish night
And she the day to decorate, and all,
In returning circuit seasons to separate,
And years enumerate ; they marvellously
Moulded of the consuming, re-producing fires
Of Muspellsheim, realm of self-evolved light.—
So as from the earth the moon, so as from the moon
Now the earth seen, they above the meeting edge
Of day and night, mingled although distinct,
Neither the one nor the other, yet of each,
The gentle, the balmy lightness, the cool, the fresh
Less light, yet not darkness, a visionary realm,
Where Aurora tripping in the brilliant beams
Of the gay Morning Star, leads on the train
Of radiant Hours, rounding the glorious car
Of Phœbus in very gladsomeness ; or rather
Daglinger's thin-woven zone, half rainbow, half
Pellucid mist, entangled thick with dreams
Whence, he, delightedly preceding Day,
(Son of his strength, and eldest born of Night)

Smiles, as peerless Sunna vigorously whirls
Sounding, her lash around the wing-footed steeds
Over the heavenly arch : each visible
To Grecian poet as to Scanian scald
Roving in voluptuous visions of delight,
In profuse imagination's fairy realms.
Sunna, to mortal eyes, now up the hills
Climbs, scattering hoar-frost from the chilly bit
Of Skeenfaxi the far-leaping ; tingling through
The sheep-boy's fingers it bites.—They, stationed high,
See her, at high noon riding o'er the eastern
Wave beyond Magindanao or the Palaos.
Brilliant her glance, shooting upward from the wide
Northern Pacific, strikes the solar shield,
(Safeguard of Earth ; Sualiner, named by gods ;
Placed to protect creation from the intense
Blaze of the Day Star, raging yet with heat
Gathered in Muspellsheim, realm of devouring fire,)
And, thence diffused, tempers alike the rays
Of her consuming car, and the dark atoms
Of the dun skirt of Night, whose sweeping robe
In shade half the earth enfolds : though to their eyes
Visible are cities huge, Titanic works
Of that vast deluge of men, which, in the infancy
Of nations rolled Westward, following the sun :
Driven off, or self-wandering, bent their rightful claim
To enforce of dominion, and all earth subdue :
Outcast of heritage by mightier tribes
Who cities built in Asiatic climes
Nearer to the ecliptic :—Ages hence to be

Revealed, to be wondered at, among the vast
Enormous rocks high-poised, and relics huge
Of elder creation; scattered over earth
By that convulsed upheaving, when the stores
Of heaven were opened, and the fountains of
The great deep were broken up, and as a globe
Of water only drowned earth rolled on:
Scarcely yet dry.—Of that o'er which the sun
Now boldly on careers; beauteous the plains,
Beauteous the valleys, beauteous the craggy glens,
Beauteous the hoary mountains capped with snow,
Had been, but blood-stained all, all saturate
With villany, with lust, encrimsoned glare
Even so as to stain the sun, whose struggling fires
Blush through the morning mist, until mountain crests
Gleam in the ruddy glow.—Dwell they upon
That cradle of mankind, whence the first cry
Of blood to heaven arose, and yet outcries;
Though buried deep in slimy ooze, and salt
And bitter fogs, deep-sighing.—From Shinar's
Rich, deep, and fruitful valley, yet ascends
The flame of Babel's tormenting; whence a foe
Never departed plunderless, now a den
Of dragons, of doleful creatures ravening:
Lady of Nations once, and now a tomb.
Over Nin-éveh dreamy oblivion broods,
Tyre despoiled, into the ocean cast,
Ammon, and Moab, and Esau desolate,
Mizraim degraded, base, and spiritless,
And Hierosolyma, her lovely lands,

Her cities, and her villages, and fields,
Smitten by a curse, and, abject and forlorn,
Spectres of departed grandeur, miserably
Sitting upon the ashes of their pomp and power ;
Wring they their hands in desolate distress
And own that their doom is righteous : blood they craved,
Blood has been crushed into an o'erflowing cup,
And they have drank it even to the loathsome dregs.—
Nearer is the Iron City, she who excelled
All previous empire, who upon their wreck
Planting her reeking standard, styled herself
Mistress of all the world, and domineered.
Subject all nations to her imperial nod,
Their kings, their nobles, at her feet grovelling ;
A venomous cancer on her own bowels gnawed,
The winds of heaven smote her, earth pouring forth
Her swarms of ferocious warriors, shook her down,
Into ten shattered shards : yet from the midst,
Semblant yet different, another yet the same,
In o'er-vaulting ambition and insidious ;
Planting her feet upon those unstable shards
Rose up another Babylon, and rules,
Yet still to rule : how long ? until her cup
Shall overbrim with iniquity.—Erect,
Stands, grows, increases still her mystic tower,
Visibly invisible, mysterious,
Founded on mystery, with mystery
Walled, arched, exalted over all earthly rule,
Haunt of fierce dragons, and of birds obscene :—
And, high enthroned within, as on Hlidsjalf

Supercilious Odin sits ; so supercilious
Sits the foul woman, on her mysterious beast,
Drugging all earth with her debasing drinks ;
Lifting up her head in daring blasphemy,
Calling herself a queen, and trampling
Over all other authority, all power,
Of kings, of peoples, of languages, of tongues :
Virtually dethroning God, and claiming rule
Above Heaven, over Earth, and even in Hell supreme.—
Hollow—all hollow—as the morning mist
Yet rolling over earth, to be dispelled
By the ascending sun.—Closer beneath,
Less hazily visible, better defined,
Stretches the present field for sharp contest
Of race against race, foul faith true faith against,
Field for their reaping.—Bright and glorious
Be it !—for now, Satan advantage taking
Of their momentary pause,—keen Spirit he
And prompt in his resolve, has, in disguise
As a blithe lark who has greeted the morning star,
Dropped from the sky, as to salute his mate,
Nested close beneath an overshadowing turf,
Dappled as herself the earth on which she sits :
Thence, couchant close, watches he the miserable
Wreck of a king ; reads every inmost thought
Through his fixed, vacant eye, and cons his heart
Labouring against, and struggling with himself,
And against foul illusions, by a swart sprite
Over his brain effused :—quick-counselling
Yet in more atrocious wiles, his favorite imp,

Begotten of Mistrust and Self-confidence,
Their fruit Despair ; dark scepter and malign :—
Off, as a bee he roves from flower to flower,
As sipping sweets and nectar swarming
Rounds over hill and dale ; then, from the coast
Starts as a petrel, dipping under the lee
Of every crested wave with skimming breast,
As to collect her oily nourishment,
Onward to Scania bent ; there to collect
Spirits congenial :—not unmarched his track
Devious or direct, even his secret soul
Read by the archangels. They each to their task
Apply ; and Raphaël, with descent direct
Earth seeks, while Michaël with his cohort roves
Lower in air, wholly invisible,
Yet, as red lightnings in a cloud enwrap,
Ready to strike in their envolumed night.

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE SIXTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E S I X T H .

The Scandinavian deities are interrupted amid their banquetting, by Satan ; and after holding a Council descend to Abyrig.

Gorgeous with gold, and through the crystal walls
Opalescent light diffusive, tempered soft,
For demon eyes unfit to sustain the glare
Of the broad sun in her splendour, seek in mist
And wide-spread cloud sublime, congenial gloom
For their pale vision ; Vinglod, her dome spreads round,
Sacred to love, to friendship, and to mirth ;
Such love, such friendship, and such genial mirth,
As fiends can form, can enjoy.—Valhalla's towers
Wholly of burnished gold, the roofs emblazed

With golden spears, domes which o'ertop the clouds
Girt with broad shields, and coats of golden mail
Around the walls heaped : splendid the glittering light
Far-streaming from sword blades, and from javelin points,
And trophied arms ; well may irradiate
The ferocious God, and his ferocious guests :
But here all is apt for feminine delight,
And soft blandishment of love : the couches gold,
Silver the floor, the walls around diapered
With fretted silver, heightened with virgin gold,
Rich set with every gem of purest ray ;
Eyes of delight, beneath whose brilliant lids,
Flash fires of dalliance : wide the crystal sky,
By floating Valkyries upborne, reflects
In every prismatic hue the splendid scene ;
Where Gods and Goddesses high banquet hold.
Banquet, like feasts of earth, where carking care
Oft poisons each dish, and as an aspic sly
Nestles in every fruit, each goblet stains.
And here rejoice the Gods ; each bullioned couch
Filled with a form muscular, or voluptuous,
As God or Goddess either fiend has chosen
To masquerade in ; and such mask beneath
To forget all fires, ages since far escaped,
Save that sharp flame which sickens every cheek,
And into their substance gnaws. The imitative heaven
Oh, how unlike that Heaven from which they fell !
Yet in it such Gods rejoice.—Grateful are the shouts,
Grateful are the steams rising up from Læderun,
And the Gods glory in extended power

et, and rooted deep.—The fane around
amped in military pride, the chiefs,
on his pampered steed, had waved his lance,
norous shield had stricken. Awful, the priests,
horses, and nine dogs, nine falcons fleet,
game-cocks, proud and fierce, nine bulls full fed,
a high blood, in form symmetrical,
aughtered to draw down victory ; rich blood
had been sprinkled : the image of Odin reeked,
tars reeked, the walls within, without,
d, and the people, the priest, the prophetess,
the dark diviners reeked, and, frantically
l as mad furies.—Odin saw, and grimly
enjoyment smiled.—Yells, and loud shouts,
rayers, and devoting oaths, had welcomed in
ne worthier victims : captive men were they
te, yea Christian men ; thrice threefold dear
in, to all the fiends. By Inguar fierce,
d blood craving, by revolting Hubba,
ir Gods devoted ; in a consecrated
ere they sent the subservient wave across,
ewly built, with gold gay glittering.
n her carven prow Odin in his state,
of ocean-war ; at either knee
and Freccon, ~~choking~~ with Sœhrimner's lard
l full gorged ; on each shoulder muscular
and Munin, with half open wings
ed, again ready to start, their tiding told,
rther intelligence craving. Red the oars,
: gold their looms, their blades as silver sheen

Red, white, and gilded shields, her trim waist docked :
Taper the red mast, varied the silken sail
Red, white, and blue, in stripes, the west wind held
Swelling capaciously ; the steersman strong
Known in the battle field, afar renowned,
Her course controuled ; and through the rolling mirror
Drove as in dominion : the sea-maidens lithe
Kissing her sharp keel, in glee revelling
Dived, rose, and gambolled, to entrancing strains
Of choral song ; and barbaric harmony
Of harp, pipe, horn, and clashing shield, and lance.—
High on the aft, and on the forward deck
Towering as a castle, gallant warriors
Danced, or with light feet ran the rails around,
Or along the heaving sweeps, all duly timed
To the wild music ; honouring the Gods
With mirth, and song, and mad agility.
Landed the freight ; tall, comely, and erect,
Steady their blue eyes, their unblanched cheeks
With health's pure tincture flushed, each had the test
Of his purer faith rejected ; the steaming flesh
Of the slain war-horse : and the maddening crowd
Shrieked loud, shrieked sharp.—On the broad altar-stone
Iron-plated, stretched ; aloft the loose-haired priest
Wielded the sacred mace : “ Odin, to thee,
Strong valorous Odin ! God of exciting slaughter !
God of rejoicing victory ! I devote
This sacrifice for victory.” Suddenly the skull
Dashed in, the brains flew wide, on whome'er falling
Gladly his lips he smeared. Cloven through the breast

Outdrawn the heart throbbing, open the entrails spread,
Their awful wands on high the diviners reared
And for signs pried : though terror, though dismay,
Though forebodings fearful, as such tokens they read
Were in each victim seen ; concealing all close
In their own bosoms, loudly to the throng
Spoke they of triumph, spoke of victory,
Spoke of rich plunder, wealth, and rioting.
Poured the red blood, into cauldrons huge and deep,
Iron, or brazen ; and sprinkled far and wide
From the thin laut-staves, blessing the high altar,
The fane, the people ; Odin's holy grove,
Each stem, each bough, each twig, each down-weighted leaf,
Mysteriously sacred with blood dripped,
And high the dead they hung ; holy to him,
God of the suspended, Lord of griesly ghosts,
Lord of the grave-mounds.—Eagerly, upward rose
Flaring the flame ; the brazen cauldrons seething,
Rich savoury food poured out—to the full feasted,
Overgorged luxuriously, reeming the ale
Mantling in the goblet, the feast-giving chief
Haesting, of Biorn war-father, and Ragnar's friend,
Blessed that full goblet, blessed that savoury flesh,
And o'er the flame waving the glowing cup,
Emptied it in honour of Odin. “God supreme !
God of ten-thousand fights ! of desolation,
Of slaughter, of fire, of victory, holy God !
Of thy might give to us glorious victory,
Anglia give it us to conquer.” Niorder's goblet
High waving, “Thou God of winds ! terrific God

Of waves, of waters, of oceans ! God of fire,
Of tempest, of whirlwind ! for us rule the storm.
The warring whirlpool, the engulfing sand,
Smooth to our keels ; and in the hungry depth
Every apostate plunge.—To thine honour Frey !
This I devote. Give to us flowers, give fruits,
Give to us glad seasons, give to us plenteous fields ;
So shall, heaped high with golden gifts thine altar,
From the far-wasted world our faith attest.”
Swift, through the sacred flame, from hand to hand
Rode on each goblet ; high the Braga-bowl
Raised the stern chieftain : “ Hear thou, mighty Thor !
Hear thou, dread Odin ! all ye mightiest Gods,
Goddesses glorious, blue Hilda ! hear,
And clash thy sounding palms, and chant thy lay.
Here, before ye, all warriors witnessing
Swear I to smite, to trample, to destroy,
Wessex the detested, Wessex the abhorred.
Sharp sword, fierce fire, hot revenge, full, full revenge
For Ragnar, for his host, shall this arm nerve,
Within this heart shall boil : so, if I fail,
Visit upon me every ill I leave undone.”
The deep draught pledged, passed the fire through and through,
Proudly the huge Remembrance-cup rode on
Upon hands extended. Ragnar, daring Rolf,
Every renowned warrior or slain friend,
Lived in the flowing stream : loud music rang,
The legend roared, shouted the joyous song,
Leaped the wild limbs ; licentious revelry,
And boasting loud, and drunken ribaldry,

To the fiends rise ; Gods, fiends, or fiendlike men
Roll in excess of riot, joyous those
In mad excitement, joyous these hoping to see
Revenge in her triumph.—Not on grateful steams,
Though of Christian blood, luxuriously the Gods
Feast, nor on luscious lard of Sœhrimner
Alone ; every clime of the outstretching world
Pours in it's plenties, pours it's delicates,
Condiments epicurean : earthworm slime,
Substanceless toad's-meat, clammy excrescence,
And dissolvingly fluid, the substance of dying men,
Food, by them prized on earth, whatever be
Their sulphurous cates in hell.—The table cleared ;
Spring from the chequered floor wide-mantling vines,
Whose clustering wonders press upon every lip,
And broad the boards groan under fruits nectarine.
Bright virgin forms into crystal goblets crush
The fragrant must, and by arch-chemistry,
Long seasoned wines of every inviting name
Sparkle, or glance, or foam, and rich the floods
Run purple on the floor : meads, hydromels,
And reeming ales, and ardent spirits instinct
With maddening excitement, circle round :
Some drink, some dice, staking conquered provinces ;
And, but the stake is already lost, would set
On a die their celestial honours : gaily some roam
Through the leafy wilds of Fensaler, a Paradise
Of pleasure, of delight : some the sward tread
In measures graceful, stately, or dignified,
To soberest music ; others, more elate,


Snapp their sharp fingers, and in rapid time
Fling through exciting reels; rattling castanets
The Bakers lead, those of more martial soul,
To clanging shields thread through the warrior mass
In Pyrrhic measures: lack not placid lakes,
Nor leaping fountains, nor dark grotts, nor groves,
For whispering mates, no fraudulent Loke there,
Though tiptoe suspicion slanders, with tongues
All babbling, follows in the shadowy path
Where loves and graces airily have danced.
In cooling grotts some hold discourses deep,
Harangue, or high debate; others of war,
And martial prowess boast; but more, far more,
Naiads, and nymphs, hunters, and huntresses,
Light-tripping fairies, or buffooning elves,
Satyrs, or fauns, or boghs, or dwarfs uncouth,
Of every fantastic shape, ill-matching beast
And bird and man, or fearful, or grotesque
Monsters of fancy, in care-killing mirth
Drown corroding conscience, so as merry flames
Sport over molten ore.—So not the chiefs.
Food, and discussion o'er, of import high,
Or how conquest to secure, or how to spread
Farther and wider their empire; to minstrelsy
Give they the passing hour; the airy harp
Passes from hand to hand, skilled harpers round
Take up the prelude, solemn, sonorous,
Or soft, and joy inspiriting; as the lay
Or rolls it's glorying tones, or the war-song,
Timed by the clashing strings, from the roof leaps,

Or around the wall crashes ; or the drinking catch
Trips from cup to goblet.—None but has practised voice
Melodious, none in affected diffidence
The proffered chords pass on.—Resounding peals
Of riotous joy have Odin's skill acclaimed,
Welcomed the birth of loveliest Poesy,
Loud praised the godlike theft : Discoursed has Frey
For Gymis daughter his consuming love ;
Gerde has blushingly sung of Skirner's sleight ;
And Brage preludes his awakening lay,
Sweeps the resounding chords, and pours his song.
“Hear ye, O Gods ! no delusive note my harp
Utters, nor o'erflows my tongue with flattery ;
Nor hopes my palm that ever the ringing fire
My Braga-laun will be. I have not drunk
Of the last cauldron the affrighted eagle filled,
Boda's pure mead has laughed my cup within,
Of gay delight drink ye all.—Eight terrible
Miles deep in earth, has Thrim, amid darkness drear,
Hidden Miolner ; hidden the fearful mace
Of Thor, loud thunderer. How shall gods contend
Against the gigantic race ? Woe, Asaheim !
Woe to thee Asaheim ! In bridal, Thrim
Freya demands, the sun, the moon requires
Handmaids on her to wait. Wearily, wearily,
Must the gods gloomily wander : How shall they bear
Loss of the sun, the moon ? how shall they lose
Freya, whose bright smile is as another sun,
Almost replacing Balder's glorious rays ?
How replace Miolner ?—Convincingly eloquent

Keen as the sun's beam, soothing as the placid moon,
Brilliant as Freya's searching, dazzling glance ;
Heimdaller persuasive, induces submissive Thor ;
Duty alone such virgin charms could yield
To such a rude giant, as on the mountain's brow
Reclines as an indulgent couch ; his dogs restrain
In leashes of gold, keeps every agile horse
Ready for adventurous chase, each glossily
Groomed, reined, and saddled ; a tall mountain pine
Shaft of his boar-spear broad, his arrows fleet
Each a silvery birch stem : upon all around
Frowning, mountains, rocks, cleave beneath his furious glance.
Woe to thee, lovely, beauteous, blushing bride !
Woe to thee, virgin, who with tearful eyes
Tremblest while goddesses, with matron care,
O'er thy soft shoulders spread the floating robe,
Conceal thee in modest hyacinthine veil,
Twine the snowy nuptial wreath thy brow around,
With golden rings thine ivory fingers deck,
Woe indeed to thee, beauteous, blushing bride !
Woe to thee, lovely virgin sacrifice !
Loke as her handmaid, splendidly they ride
In chariot far-blazing : fleet of foot her goats
Whirl them o'er land, o'er sea, o'er cliff, o'er cloud.
Spread the rich nuptial feast ; trembling, ashamed,
Bashful, the maiden delicately feeds,
Her diet spare but eight salmon and one ox,
And only three flagons her stint beverage ;
Eight nights of travel sorely have sobered down
Thirst and fresh appetite. Alas ! sweet maid,—

Faintly she softly sighs ; her giant love
Amorous, and gorged with food, his brawny arm
Winds around her slender waist, she, coyly shrinking
With taper fingers removes his daring hand :
Mad with strong ale, rudely he snatches up
Her veil, it rends, mild her reproachful eye
Soft rolls, gently swells her heaving bosom deep,
In sweet, in retiring, in graceful modesty.
Licentious the lover, awed stares stupidly—
“ Eight nights she has not slept, the weary road
With her eagerness grew longer, mild her eyes
Bleared are with weeping” ; simperingly her maid
Archly replies, and full the melting orbs,
Rich in their dewy lustre, towards him roll
Softly rebukeful.—Round goes the reeming ale,
Round his brain reels, the maddening draught he drinks
Of beauty, resplendent in gold, in loveliness.
He languishes, he craves, he surrenders.—Miolner
Lies upon Freya’s lap—he, amorous,
Tries the rich zone ; she sobs, she sighs, she weeps,
In enticing coyness turns her glowing cheek,
Stoops he her soft consenting kiss to take.—
Swiftly crashing the mallet through his hot brain drives.
He leaps, he staggers, he falls.—Rock over rock
His huge sons roll, high toppling o’er them all
Whirls round the giant wife.—Drink we full cups,
Swing round the bowl !—Health to the maiden sweet
Who taught an unmannerly bridegroom how to dance !
Health to Thor, blushing virgin” !—Merrily,
Merrily roars, merrily shouts the long,

Redoubling, irresistible laughter ; yet the more
Merry, when high, in ponderous gravity
Rising with shoulders huge from the yielding couch,
He with lisping, modest, unobtrusive tongue,
Asks "where is my bard's gift, where is my Braga-laun"?
Loud, louder still, the shout, the laugh round ring ;
Laughter the walls, laughter the floor resounds,
Table to roof with echoing laughter peal,
Laughter in laughter riots.—Creeping mist,
Mist, deadening, palsyng ; mist, searching through
Blood, bone, and marrow, and heart ; a shuddering mist,
A horror-creating darkness : Gods though they be
Their deity is weak : terror, appalling
Through them all strikes ; in the all-deforming gloom
Each to his fellow seems more horribly
Pallid, more terrified : trembling their knees
Audibly knock, they cling, they crouch, they fall,
Stupified in distress :—dark, dark, all dark ;
Darkness of dreariest darkness, palpable
As that of Egypt, when nor day nor night
For three day's length were separate : as Erebus,
Darkness of devouring darkness : so they sit,
Breathe and hear darkness ; every pulsation beating
In an agony of darkness, as they feel
An undefined sense of some impending,
Down-crushing weight, the moaning air compressing ;
A suffocating weight, weight that will leave
Nothing beneath it.—Long, long, long they sit,
So long amazed, eternity were a short
Term to denote it's continuance :—yet it departs



Slowly and noiselessly as on it came,
To their scared vision, the walls of Gladheim revealing,
Gold, fretted o'er with gorgeous embossments rich,
Atchievements of gods, or, where gold lies unseen,
Pannels of costlier worth embellished high ;
Mosaic of gems, of every hue and clime
Godlike assaults depicting, godlike daring,
Godlike endearments, history of gods
Written by gods in their own pictorial tongue.
High, on the highest throne ; high over all
Satan dread sovereign sits, scarcely yet less
Brilliant, than when the Star of Lucifer
Shone in the ascendant. Awful, his look severe
Disturbed, yet authority bears : gigantically,
Harmoniously vast, less enormous seems
He than in reality ; so huge, so ponderous,
Diminutive are all else. As in thought he sits,
None seeing, regarding none : Thought, deepest thought
Upon his brow brooding, upon his trunk, his limbs ;
He sits as thought instinct, embodied thought,
They as astonishment frozen.—Gauzy, filmy robes,
Ill for such presence fit, confusedly dropped ;
Move they grave senators, and matrons staid
In stateliest dignity. His high throne, each
In reverend majesty, with measured step
Assumes ; or with his goddess on lower seat,
Or at his feet :—Nor is the floor unthronged.
Into condensed space contracted each,
Though each in native stature the skies had reached :
Dense, the attentive auditory waits.—

He speaks ; the sound of thousand thousand feet
Is of multitudinous waters, as all stand
Respectful to their chief. Waning the light,
From his pale brow over all profusely shed,
So like, they all instantaneously revert
To that dreadful day, when proudly in their front
He trod as the Omnipotent in arms.
Scarcely less splendid, though of glory shorn
Now, as, compared with suns, dim planets shine.
They glowing, but in spectral glory gleam,
Yet themselves deem great Gods.—Advisedly,
He as an Eastern-despot holds his state :
And, secret grief repressed, and anger stayed,
In deliberate tone speaks thus.—“Wearied and worn,
Roaming o’er land, o’er sea, through fire, through flood ;
Sailing amid the darkness, amid the storm ;
Piercing all elements, outsoaring all,
And through the countless myriads of worlds
Wandering my uneasy way ; way, not with flowers
Nor odorous dews overspread, but anxious cares
Of state and of empire ; above all ye peers,
Only distinguished by the barren gripe
Of this barren sceptre ; honour that does but mark
Me the more distinctly for the Tyrant’s aim.
Yet had I hoped that ye, by misfortune bound
In my ill fortune, had by that compact
Shared in my painful cares ; and, for a moment,
A pain of desolation, of loneliness,
My spirit oppressed : now I more freely breathe
Princes, Powers, Potentates, Dominions, Thrones ;

Titles less lofty than the sons of earth
To ye rightlier have awarded, Goddesses, Gods,
Of all this lower world ; to whom worship rises
From every realm and clime, ten-thousand named,
And every name a regal attribute,
Gods among kings, and kings among all gods,
By your intrinsic worth. I envy not
Your pleasures, your sweet joys, congenial joys
To your apt titles here, far other joys
Congenial in other climes, since we have ruled
His torments to be our joys, revenge refined ;
Nay I joy in your joys, and much am loth
Not to unbend, but that imperial state
Has cares imperial, and although thus loth
Ye from those joys to call, it me behoves
To bid ye your armour forthwith buckle on,
And bowne ye for the war. War is at hand
Or I the signs misread ; war to exterminate
His faith or all our faiths, faiths wide as earth,
And every faith diverse ; each one adverse
To His faith, more or less enfeebling faith,
That suffers, that endures, that creeps, that cringes,
Crawling in one narrow path, nor dares to touch
One fruit, one flower beyond. Such puny faith,
Harmless and unaggressive, were beneath
Our condescending glance, but that He loves
Therefore we it detest. Your bold onsetting
Severely has shaken it, and He in dread,
Lest ye for ever from his rule should wrest,
The race he created our vacant thrones to fill ;

(Thrones yet unfilled, and ours by eternal right,) A phalanx, all armed, has with important haste Shot down direct, and now upon the limit Of ether rest close encamped : these tracking, I, From hard by heaven's gate, even to this earth, Hereto have hastened with unslacking speed, Wisest debate to hold ; whether to defy Directly to the death, (to yield as beyond Our intention as his wish) or, by war-craft, In lengthened strife to entangle him and his, Is in you to counsel?"—A wearying space perplexed, Mute, and debating each within himself, Each chafing upon rebuke, and all convinced Less calm had been that rebuke, had common peril The sting not taken out ; and conscious that danger Makes union stern necessity, they sit ; Each, from his sovereign glance anxious to guess The counsel most sure to please. Heimdaller, Bright God and golden-toothed, whence tinged, his words Wise, and imbued with learning, drop as gold, In measured accents speaks. " Reputed keen Of eye, of ear, beyond the perfection far Of man, of god, set on defensive watch Shame best would me befit who have been surprised : But that, beyond all gods, omniscient As omnipresent, our dread emperor Exalted sits supreme ; Honour were shame Had I traversed this fated excellence. Thus at advantage taken, hesitation Best fits our counsel, 'ere the dice we throw

That be sure
 That power superior
 Of time, forth burst
 Gion, and involve us all.
 Attest foiled, now were it wise
 To provoke? we know not yet
 Of this march: though in arms sheathed
 Is it not they are upon warfare bent,
 May be exercised their limbs to keep
 From idly stiffening: if bent on war,
 Their object of attack we may not be.
 All yet uncertain, I, our mountain home
 Would strengthen, if strength be needful, would redouble
 Watch at our point of access: wakeful delay
 Cannot our chance impair, and must disclose
 Ere long their bidding, so shall we, prepared,
 Better and more informed, be less at fault
 In our decision." Majestically he sits,
 Murmuring applauses gather into strength;
 When Brage rises. "Behoves me not to say
 How skilful and how wise is our compeer;
 Whose virgin mothers, patronesses of art,
 From their nine bosoms ministered their lore,
 Centered in him:—That he is prudent, we
 Gladly subscribe, or this his counselling
 In vain were said; farther I cannot step
 In commendation. Witless it were to affect
 Concealment of our dread of what we know,
 And strive to fancy we are not the mark
 Of his aim, who abhors us as we him detest:

He our master, for we know it, rebels we,
Fugitive servants, more than fugitive
His opponents resolute. What! have we not
His image degraded? did not disease and death,
Following in the train of sin, triumphantly
Our great prince greet, and we as swiftly hie
Followed, enveloped indeed by hellish flame,
The bridged abyss across; and now disport
Ourselves in this ruined earth? Have we once failed,
Have we once shrunk, have we once shewn ourselves
Open to compromise, to truce, to peace?
No: we have stood upon our right, and meant,
As still we mean, stout warfare; until he,
Or we are disenthroned; here throned in spite
Persistent. True, he spoke of oracles.
Oracles, and traditions! Whence derived?
From rumour:—what is rumour? dreams or lies.
Have we not here substantial empire? hence
Have we not driven him, and all his cares
To one little speck reduced? and shall we shrink
For Vola's babbling, for a spae-wife's talk?
This is our day of triumph, and we mean
It shall not be his triumph: well we know
He means it not for us, or Michäel
Had not so distant an errand. Let us then
Task all our wisdom, all our skill, our strength,
Outwit his wit, with his own weapon fight;
And, for that our aptest instruments are men,
Outgoing far our excitement, in excess
Of lust, or of hatred; urge all the iron North

Into one such other onset, as to sweep off
The very name of Christian from that isle,
That we may cleanse the world. That island his
Or ours, the world will follow, and he in disgust
Of his misreckoning, to us will leave
Possession undisturbed. He dare not dare
His strength against ours here in contest to pit,
Knowing in such commotion, all his work
Must go to wreck."—As the unstable waters
Yield to each breathing wind, and adverse run
In counter currents, so the assembly wavers
Although entitled gods.—Bold Tyr, fierce Hilda,
(Mars and Bellona named in other lands)
And beauteous Freya softly delicate,
Counsel for open war, extreme, unremitting,
Though heaven, though earth, though hell, uprooted be
And universal darkness bury all.
Rising serenely Thor, and dignified,
With his belt of prowess girded, and enarmed
With rattling Miolner, stands, as Phidias
In ivory had sculptured Thundering Jupiter,
And given that image life. So is he like
To the Grecian Thunderer, that but the North
Had given him hardier form, an artist eye
Had deemed the one the other. Calm as fate
He speaks, and smiles sublime as roseate light
On the cloud-towering mount, when Evening
In her dun pall the drowsy world shrouds up,
And Contemplation muses in breathless joy.
"That I dread conflict, O immortal gods!

(Immortal must we be, or only to be
Mortal when Earth shall die, as dim tradition
Obscurely has pronounced) all who know my might,
And who my prowess knows not? will not think.
Nor, in impatience, would I that wrath rouse
Whose irresistible fury, although restrained
When we the Everlasting Might assailed
Dreaming to usurp his throne, precipitated
A hail of gods, vexing the Abyss of Fire
Into which we fell, whence with strugglings huge we emerged.
Nor in blank fear would I the shock avoid,
But meet it should it come. Of this be sure
His work he will not mar, as marred it must.
Be, if hell's angels shock with heaven's hosts.
Therefore we know, as such assured thought
Is to knowledge equal, that this armament
Marches but to shew force will by force be curbed,
If force needful be; but force we need not use;
Force will not then against us be employed.
Delusion and temptation the apt arms
By which we yet have wrought, needs must be best,
Since these our daring leader used, when man
By woman's persuasion fell, she first misled
By his suggestion, not overawed by force.
Force, the war of elements unreasoning,
Where bulk, and weight, and motion, overcome
The less rapid, less heavy, less enormous.—I have said.”—
In height, in strength, in stature as a God
Uprises Odin, in his dignity
In his authority, and calmly looks

Around upon all the Gods. Faultless in form,
Faultlessly beautiful in countenance,
Winningly lovely in his smile, serene,
August, and reverend, alluring all
And none repelling ; in his lustrous eye
A placid heaven reposes, that deep brow
It's awful cope of cloud ; sublimer, more attractive
Spirit had not fallen. As Belial in his sweetness,
As Baal-zêbub in his glittering brightness,
Baal in lordly eminence, Moloch cruel
In vengeance, in fury, in insatiate thirst
Of slaughter, of outrage, of blood ; his smile within
All live irradiant, his frown beneath
Confusion, and death, destruction, and dismay,
In angry horror glare. In bearing commanding,
And in voice sonorous, repressing hard
His rebellious anger, bidding persuasion tip
His tongue with courtesy, he blandly speaks.
“ Princes, Powers, Potentates : it irks me much
That Spirit, high, and wise, and dignified,
And strong beyond all strength, and brave beyond
All godlike bravery, should in this contést,
O ! how unlike his terrific daring when
Giant upon giant fell, and heaven shrunk back
From the assailing heap, now condescend
Behind example to screen ; fallaciously
That example adducing :—True it is, for truth
Still is most true, in Heaven, in Earth, in Hell,
Ever unchangeable where'er she be :
Our mighty emperor, beneath whose banner

Ye rank me as first in love, in loyalty,
Rank me in valour first ; and gratefully
Acknowledge I your election : did delusion
Employ to entrap man's progenitor, and used
Woman to encompass man. Wherefore ? of fear ?
No—of necessity.—Man had free will
To stand in his obedience, or to fall
In disobedience. By superior might,
As who can doubt such might the spheres had bound
Or carried war again to heaven's gate
Had force been policy ? had man, enforced,
Broken God's law, man had still been obedient
Although the fruit had been eaten ; and God's law
Still had remained intact. Man could not fall
But in his own consent, by his own deed.
Delusion and temptation are not our arms :
Our arms are strength, and justice, and resolve
Our right to hold : but he who made the law
To the only course, perforce made us resort,
By which that law could be broken ; and our chief
Dared worthily, succeeded worthily,
In his dread daring : honour to him be due !
Not covert insult."—Deep as thunders roll
Muttering in the horizon, gathering,
Gradually, increasing, volleying, roaring loud,
So the acclamation of Hell's mighty peers
Rings to the roof-tree : pealing, peal on peal,
It crashing bursts, until satiated applause
Sinks in it's own exhaustion.—“ Every man,
Weakened indeed by the poison which infected

The fountain of his descent, therefore is less
Able to overbear his passions ; yet has he free
Will and unfettered, and if he fall, he falls
In his own sin, and we no more can force
Man into sin, than can His emissaries
Compel man to do good ; compulsion as destructive
Of righteousness as of crime : We therefore wound
Doubly the tyrant, when, tempting we succeed,
By revenge, and in our triumph, that we dare
Do him despite ; and that his cherished work
Him has deserted, him has set at nought.
Of such reproach, no more :—intended not,
But to misconstruction open ; careless ears
Guided alone by sound, not weighing well
The speaker's argument :—too devoted Thor
To be suspected so.—Not here in truth
Is the question of man's fall. By fraud he fell,—
So be it ;—we debate how we shall act
Where in question man is not.—Where it has pleased
Him, whom chance of war made arbiter of Heaven,
And us arbiters of hell ; by our own daring,
Of our own free will of this earth arbiters,
And by man's choice : when it has that power pleased
In his high scorn, in his sovereign contempt
To insult us in our own realm, and by an armament
Sent down express to hold us under threat ;
Then is it question whether we take up
The gage of battle, or as slinking curs
Conceal our defenceless portion, howl and whine
And whimper.—I need not to ye recall,

It galls, it stings you in your inmost essence,
Rankles in every stripe, heats every chain ;
(For we were chained, were striped, were outraged slaves,
Had we not willed our freedom, to these thrones
Risen by our merit, and by our endurance
Made chains, and stripes, and manacles, our jest,
Our pleasant pastime :) Need I not recal,
Need I not remind you, that aggression ceaseless,
Or on our frontiers, or into the very heart
Of our domain, has been his policy.
When our dread sultan, in exulting pride
Over his trophy gloated, was not a threat,
A degrading threat resorted to ? His head
Doomed to be crushed, erect and fearless yet
Despises the crusher. Was not our subjected world,
Her gigantic sons, her delicious daughters whelmed
Deep in the envious wave ? When Belus' tower
High threatening the sky scaled, did not fierce fire,
The Thunderer's fire, rend, burn, vitrify,
Molten the Mass ? The Cities of the plain,
Famed for our indwelling, by sweltering hail
Flaming bitúmen, and by sulphur scourged,
Into utter destruction cast, were buried deep,
In the afflicting lake, of perpetual death,
Perpetually called, whence life in horror
Perpetually flees, and cries, death ! death !
Did not he thunder upon our chosen host
When the Red-sea at his stern bidding fled,
And in recoil, wasted the Egyptian strength
To our despite ? In défiant contempt,

In humblest guise did he not this earth walk
(Worthy disguise, for such unworthy end)
Us taunt, and us despoil, holding us all
In our great emperor, in direct rebuke?
Bid death her prey yield up? bid leprosy
Her victims surrender? and from our greedy gripe
Throw us off as vermin? In our exultation
When he in the grave lay stretched, and Hela laughed
Strengthening her adamantine bars; did he
Snap her bonds as burning flax, and through our host
Pass in indignant scorn? Were we defied,
Taunted, aye scoffed, aye obtrusively set at nought,
At Cæsar's judgment seat? in Areopagus,
In renowned Ephesus, our Capitols?
Have we not been assailed in Parthia,
In Media, India? Where were we not assailed?
Were not our altars insolently overthrown
In the Home of Protecting-Gods? Did our own priest
Defile our own temple? Persistent aggression,
Persistent threatening, persistent scorn
Are his; but behoves us now unflinchingly,
Scorn, threatening, vile aggression to return,
To look the imminent consequence in the teeth,
And meet it boldly.—Is it not enough
Abdiel the revolted, who in the great contest
The first blow struck, should here be in command,
As it were to taunt us on? but that this host
Precipitant should be sent under Michæel;
Michæel of all the princes most our foe,
Is more than patience, prudence, fixed resolve

Not to fight but in extremity, can bear.—
Do we not here rightful dominion hold !
Have we not gained our realm by warfare just,
And fair, and open ! We not a blow have aimed :
Man against man has warred, our votaries
Have his overthrown ; we by election stand
Their Gods-Protectors ; and, or I misread
The noble daring in your eyes glistening,
Princes ! Dominions ! Potentates ! ye will
This day our right assert ; this day decide
To be the last, when we shall yield and yield,
Yielding ever to have more required.—Here we stand
As the last step backward, or if we stand not here,
Here trample upon this puling, mawkish faith ;
Ill can I read the dark, portentous signs,
If it do not so scourge us, that rocks, caves,
Mountains precipitous, and forests wild,
Though thick as my own groves with pendent gifts,
Ill shall conceal us.—Shorn of dignity,
Skulking in wretched Shamanism, plunged
Into consuming deserts, there to hide
In a miserable Fetish, even there not safe
From inroad, and if driven thence ;—whither ?
Whither ?—Shall I invite ye to it's bland retreats,
It's cooling grotts, it's fountains, it's calm skies,
It's gales, it's zephyrs ? will ye bathe ye there
Among sportive naiads, intoxicated with the sweets
Of it's Sabæan odours ? Do ye shrink
From effeminate enjoyment ? Would ye then
Stretched be again upon it's fiery lake

Salted with it's furious spray, in your deep wounds
Anguish redoubling? would ye in it's rapids
Be tossed be whirled? or, haply, in some lull
Of counter-current, raise your despairing eyes
To the reflecting concave, starred with fires
Raining down baleful influence? or, thence torn,
In glaciers wild be pent, gnashing, endure
Not penance, that were task to be wrought out,
But ceaseless punishment, unending woe,
To which the extremest opposites of this earth
Were relaxations gentlest? And shall this Michäel,
This minion in peace-polished panoply,
He, singly who dare not in fair pitched fight
Encounter the least of us, with boastful scoffs
Again the adamantine gates shut hard,
And bar them against escape? Be sure that thence
No more escape shall be.—Hear ye the alternative—
Earth in all honour, Hell in all disgrace.—
All worlds among, there is no other world
Where we can sojourn. Save this, all have stood
Firm in obedience.—Princes! Potentates!
Dominions! Powers! shame that we should here
Consult when deeds are wanting. For myself,
I choose close conflict, nor do I yet despair
Our thunderer's aid: shoulder to shoulder yet,
Through the red slaughter shall we fiercely wade,
And yon pernicious crew his might shall know,
And the mighty strength of all.—Arm! arm! arm! arm!
The battle field is Anglia; of that field
Wessex the trysting place.”—Angrily

Commanding from his throne, sternly Satan bids
The noisy conclave hush :—but war is up :
Confusion, and wild uproar, yell, and shout,
And the whole hall of winged spirits is full
Armed for all conflict ; warriors of all forms
Swarm as motes in sunbeams : his infuriate cry
But a maiden's whisper seems.—As, powerless
Man stands when some deep-seated secret mine,
Touched by the nitric spark, explodes, and hurls
Fortress, and tower, and ponderous cannon huge,
And plays with them as straws ; so, powerless
To calm the maddening crowd, is their emperor :
When, from her high seat, steadily severe,
Friga bids them silence :—they forthwith are mute,
As infants by potential finger checked.
Ages have rolled by since the sons of earth,
In impious rebellion the only God against,
Against Him who made all, who all he made over rules,
Termed her The Mother of Gods ; by various names
Hertha or Isis or Friga or Cybele
Known ; and the foul fiends, humouring man's fruitful sin,
Sin with all other sins pregnant, sin of sin,
So held her and so obeyed ; until long use
Grew into habit, and, as a mother they,
Bowed to and rendered her honour : so, a cub
By a bitch nursed, will crouch, will shrink in fear,
Even in his lordliest majesty before
His earliest controller.—Reverent
Before his mother, his sister, and his wife,
Stands Odin, all listen. “ Children, ye were wont

To hearken, to obey : obey me still,
For your well being. Princes, kings are ye,
Potentates mightiest ; Rulers ye of air,
Of ocean, of earth, Highest gods over all,
These mightiest elements your weapons were
Were war in the ascendant sign.—'Ere that ye, Odin,
Niorder, and Frey, and Freya, holy Gods
Journeyed from Asgard, near to the mountain ridge
Of cloud-capped Imaus ; Woden, Friga, Thor,
(The Supreme, the Earth, and their mighty son, the Lord
Of the Mountain throne, resistless Thunderer)
Here ruled, here were worshipped ages all age beyond.
Confusion ensued. As conquerors ye brought
Strange worship, and with us divided realm ;
For why should God with brother God contend ?
But in the depth of ages, deep, deep concealed
In the fountain of future time, with prophetic voice ;
Or of the Virgin Fates whose power fast binds
Past, Present, Future ; following whose lip,
Or urged on by whose influence, even we
Else knowing all, know not : Vola the seer
Darkly speaking, uttered truths, awfully obscure,
Fate dimly enfolding. Shuddering we know ;
Knowing must we tremble, knew we yet no more.—
Rejoice while yet ye may, be strong, bear rule
While yet ye can rule.—Hear !—The Age of blood,
The Age of swords, the Age of rapine, of lust,
The Age of commotion, ocean and earth at war,
Mountains ploughing rapidly through the angry deep,
Terrified ocean rearing, impending, falling,

Sweeping away rock, and isle, and continent,
And universal nature in amaze
Yet are in embryo.—We shall not cease,
Nor home be driven, (wretched home and sad)
Until the fiery conflagration black,
Shall with it's hungry flame this world devour,
And discriminating judgment sit o'er all.—
Be your deliberation momentous,
By knowledge, by expedience, by wisdom curbed.”—
Mute they all sit—the oil the waves has stilled,
And into predicted circumstance penetrating,
Ominously foreboding each with griping hand
Presses into his burning brow. Anxiety
And dreadful suspense in haggard ghastliness
Over all brood.—So, avenging Earth gaping wide,
Stood Dathan, stood Abiram, stood their hosts.—
Gazing so stand they, until Satan gathering heart
Lest they should, terror-stricken, spread their wings
And speed them on the instant back to hell:
Every feature re-composing, and assuming
Calm and resolved countenance, arises
Slowly deliberate. Astounded they
So look astounded, as seeing him yet less
Astounded, and from his steadiness gathering strength;
Uneasy, yet with encouraged countenance
Await they his bidding. “Duly and well have I weighed
O powerful Kings, Princes, and dauntless Peers!
On whose smooth brows, firm resolution sits,
And fixed endurance: coolly deliberate,
Wise your debate, debate in worthiest words

With worthiest reasons enforced ; so perfectly poised
• The balance, carefully, painstakingly,
Had I thus long ye in suspense to hold.
Good the reasons for delay : and, could I yield
To my own desiring, to my own heart's wish ;
Better the reasons for contest.—I defer
To your resolve, well-weighed, made manifest
By your wise calmness.—Be it so, my friends !
Our courage we will repress, will soothe, will chasten
Our boiling blood ; yet not be less prepared
For conflict if enforced : enforced, their rashness
Chastised shall teach them not to beard the lion
In his own fastness. Armed, yet on this resolve
Steadily bent to act, hence we adjourn
To ancient Abyrig ; there to encamp
Ready our friends to aid, our foes to awe.”—
Uprising, the sound of tramping multitudes
Shakes Gladheim.—Issuing in rejoicing haste,
Breathing more freely, even the most defiant
Glad his own threats to escape : nor Satan less
Joyous to avoid the harsh arbitrement :
Arbitrement which, the rankling memory
Of time long past, makes fresh as of yesternight,
And unsouls him despite of pride : yet, proud he adds,
Under an even tone his delight concealing,
“ There ye in strictest watch, and completely armed
At every point, despising relaxation
Of military discipline await.
I as my wont, my round will duly make
Of observation.”—Suddenly unfurled

From between his shoulders, stretch dark pennons, broad
As monsoon-clouds rolling, shadowing provinces;
Or, as the warping swarms of locusts, thick,
And fleet, and ravenous, shutting out the sun
From realms, and shedding terror on the earth;
High he ascends sublime, and 'e'er that sight
Such rapid flight can measure, fades, is lost.—

Far, from Valasialf's lofty throne and strong
Terror of nations, Hlidsialf, overseeing
The confines of all earth, it's bights, and bays,
Mountains, and promontories; Odin describes
Spirit and Memory, his soothsayers,
Hastening from Anglia. In his thirsty ear
Pour they of all events intelligence
Since their last journeying westward. Clearly he
Sees distant Abyrig, exactly discerns
The extent of the Pagan camp.—At the broad gate
Of the silver palace saddled, Sleipner neighs
Burning for flight, pawing the heavenly earth
Neighs he impatiently, and impatiently
Earth's listening steeds, the generous cry repeat,
Snap their restraining halters, through the streams—
Plunge, overscour the plains, upclimb the mounts,
Scenting the maddening joy.—Twofold his legs,
Over land, over sea, the lightning he outstrips,
Dull thought, lagging far behind.—The warrior god
Armed, into the saddle vaults. Splendid the gold
Lights heaven, suffuses the shattered mountain crest,
Floods plain, floods valley. On his gleaming helm
Raves fury, raves slaughter, both deformed as fierce,

And ever ravening. Rumour, thousand-tongued,
Precedes, and following his sanguine track,
Limps misery, crawls distress. His flaming sword
Is destruction, and his ruddy shield around
Courses devastation, brandishing on high
Torches: a broad sea of devouring fire
Rolling before her, cities swallows up,
Groves, woods, and forests; and, calcined, the rocks
Thirst for the thirst-dried rivers.—Hilda, armed
Her blue mail with glaring meteors glittering,
Strides a virago, on her shield clattering
Impatient for any strife.—Majestically,
By the blood of Quaser, Fiolner-Odin's mead,
Inspired to ecstasy; the Poet-god,
The prince, the parent of the bard's blest art
And of wisdom, and rich eloquence; in clouds,
Brage precedes: around his golden harp,
Music and verse in measured cadence tread
Gracefully the dance, and, rioting in his lay,
Pleasure and acclamation float entranced.
Tyr the sagacious, Tyr the resolute,
Tyr the redoubted, Tyr the intrepid God,
Tyr who shrunk not his brave right hand to pledge,
And lost it, off at the wolf's-joint featly snapped
By Fenris revengeful; tricked by perjured gods.
Of champions protector, God of the warrior strife,
Though one-handed the battle in suspense he holds
And at will turns the tide of victory.—
Nor less in valour, marches Vali strong,
Vali the archer; gallant, godlike son

Of Odin, of loveliest Rinda ; daughter she
Of Dagr's blest charioteer, bright Sunna named ;
She of Mundelfara daughter, whose staff around
The fixed, the wandering fires, in order move
Dispensing periodic light.—A goodly pair
Of brethren warlike, comely, straight, and tall,
Perfect at every weapon, in every art
Of their high craft ; apt to conceive, to act,
Each skilful stratagem, as apt to dare
Hardest achievement, on they stoutly move
Pillars of battle, worthy of their rank.—
Safe in their guardianship, Iduna fair
In close-clasped casket wondrous apples holds,
Food of the gods : When grey age, crisped and sere,
Drinks up their strength, from the rich fruit they draw
Renewal of youth, of vigour, of ruddy health ;
Hence high trust deemed, trust now in trustiest hands.—
Throned in her chariot, in superior state
Revered the Great Mother sits. Awful, her eye
Sovereign command challenges, yet winning smiles,
Love, grace, and truth, and matronly dignity,
Round her lips play, and on her fair brow live.
She from Fensaler, highly renowned hall,
Rich to profusion, beauteous in ornament,
Skilful in fabric, in taste scorning rivalry,
Called hence the Abode Divine, in her state passes
Drawn by two brindled boars, not such as earth
Bears, but as heaven in it's rich-teeming forms,
Agile, strong, graceful. At her sparkling wheels
Ride on white steeds, Fylla and Gna, her maids

Goddesses graceful, never valourous knight
For more beauteous mistress sighed.—Fylla retains
Her sandals of gold, wondrously wrought with Elorrid's
War against Thiaz. Gems all price beyond,
Tributes from every realm, her casket holds
Scooped from one eastern pearl:—Her shoulders bear
Gold-woven her flaxen tresses, girded in
By a golden band, tokening her virgin state.—
Gna, on her active steed, with graceful ease
And skill matured, o'er air, o'er fire, o'er flood,
On message of duty bent, in fearless haste rides ;
And, from her name, all who by art-magical
Course on, unharmed the fleet-winged clouds beyond,
Are Gnævari entitled.—Nor her pellucid shield
Holds Lyna unprepared, ever on the wing
Over Friga's suppliants she the broad orb waves
Protective.—In self-centered majesty
Rides Thor, rides Sifia ; she, his wife beloved.
Over the mountain home he rules supreme,
Lord of the wind, the storm ; of light, of fire,
Animating spirit. The revolving seasons, he
Bids, and their course they run ; rejoicing earth
Becomes pregnant, and rich rain, and sunshine clear,
Plenty dispense, and fulness. Broad the crown
Girts round his awful brow ; sceptred his hand
Rules nations ; his war-mace with fire inwreathed,
Mace that to him returning who launched the blow,
The giants holds in dismay. Strong, sturdy-necked,
Tanguioster, Tangrisuer, proudly draw
Rattling his chariot. Flect as hunted deer

O'er rock, mount, precipice, deep, steep-down vale,
They leap, they bound, they fly; the bridges smoke,
The rivers dry, the fountains blaze with fire,
He in his fury driving.—His train gracing,
Modi and Magni, one for strength renowned,
The other for mental fortitude, his sons,
In manly bearing stride.—Uller the son
Of Sifia glad mother, he for form commended,
And countenance attractive, and skill in arms;
An eager huntsman upon snow-skates borne,
Can at his utmost stretch the javelin dart
Or unerringly wing the arrow: Man nor god
His aim elude; all that in single fight
Daringly engage, to him their secret prayers
Offer for success, and in judicial strife
Of arms his aid invoke.—At his sword side
Strenuous Vidar holds his way; Son of dread Thor,
Second he only to his father ranks
In strength, in prowess; often in deep distress
To him the gods have sought, when dangers frowned
Impendent. No so subtle element but he
Can walk it unseen, unheard: silence his attribute,
Silence his strength, his skill, and his success,
Secret silence: hence God of Silence fitly named,
And favourite of Thor, whose descending lightnings strike
In silence. Bilskirner as the valorous band
Forth of it's portals marches, glows, the sound
Of acclamation from ten thousand tongues
Rises, roars, re-echoes through the winding halls,
And the wide plains, and abrupt mountains hoar,

Tarns, streams, and woods, the ascending shout take up ;
Resounding, crashing, and reverberating,
Reverberating, crashing, and resounding,
Fading in distance, and again exploding,
Far in æereal mist.—Nor in less glory
Yet in inferior majesty, Yngve-Frey,
And Yngve-Freya, brother and sister, born
In Vanaheim to Niord ; he his sister wife
For ambition repudiated, ill to match
With Skada, ruthless Odin's adulterous paramour.
Born of the Ocean-cliff and the Iron-pine.
Queen of the rock, the snow, and deep blue sky,
She could not on the ocean-couch find rest,
Could not brook the screaming of the ocean-birds,
But, snatching her twanging bow, and binding hard
Her swift-winged snow-skates, onward she fearlessly
Tracked the rein-deer, and through the craving bear
Drove her arrows slaughtering : yet she in fiercer lust
Many heroic sons to Odin gave,
To Norseland many kings : brood of such spawn
No marvel that kings and murderers were as one,
Abhorred to distant time.—Frey vigorous,
God of the sun, rain, harvest, of comfort, of peace,
Of wealth, and of plenty, sees his altar smoke ;
And the fiend triumphs in self-deluded man's
Worship of the false ; giving to him attributes
Only appropriate to the only true.—
Freya, in answering beauty, yet more refined,
More delicate, more voluptuous, moves or sits,
Superior as goddess of the smiles and loves ;

Masking her nature the poet's dream beneath
(Known under far different form in the nether world)
And though in tempting beauty venomous,
Not, as in luxurious climes Venus-Aphrodité
Revelling in Paphos. Chaster the Northern air
Attempered breathes, and conjugal affection
Has it's own deity ; (alas that man
Could such idea embody, then idolatrously
Fall down and worship his own work. It attests
Man is not wholly depraved, a spark of heaven
Yet in his essence lives.) Weeping she sought
Oder in every land, hence thousand-named
Mardela, Hœna, Gefna, and, endeared
To the aching bosom, Vanadis goddess of hope ;
Hope to her unfulfilled : Nossæ and Gersenne,
Gem-like, fair daughters are her only hope
Her husband may return. Bending she sits,
Gracefully her sweeping mantle's floating folds,
And veil hyacinthine her faultless symmetry
Conceal yet disclose. Decorated not hidden by
Golden looped-rings, the white fingers hold her robes
In dignity matronlike ; oft used, the keys
At her girdle shew housewifery, modest the wreath
Her fair brow across, subduing shadow spreads,
Lovely in all but most in the chaste wife.—
Siofna, Lofna, Vara, graces dearer,
Better, and lovelier than Grecian art,
In it's prolific creation ever conceived :
Affection, reconcilment, nuptial truth,
Wait at her call, and bless the endearing pledge,

The trust, the troth of love : avengers stern
To punish the traitor to love's féalty.
So in their loveliness ride they, that the angels
Weep at their semblance to Heaven's holy host.—
Foréster the God of Justice, arbiter
And appeaser of all broils ; to his decisions
Satisfied all submit, for he is son
To Balder, and Nanna devoted, his fair wife.
Truth in it's essence, and abiding faith,
Unfit for demon gods who no faith know
But follow the expedient : wavering guide
Of trickster statesmen ; sure to bemire them
In their own filthy sloughs. Pure truth, outcast
By fraud malicious, in the abyss remains
Re-enthroned to be when purified the Earth
Shall arise in her virgin glory.—Loke of fraud
Cunning artificer, adroitly caught
In the net of his own devising, there yet shall be
Ever bound fast.—Ill would the world fare on
Wanting in truth, did not reproachless justice
Her office fill, though oft by criminal sleights
Into injustice warped. He in Fosetisland,
Since named the holy-isle where Elf outpours
Her tribute to the ocean, was long adored.
Every beast was sacred there, none impiously
Drew from the sacred fountain save in awe
And silence.—Following him Synia, portress of his gate,
Noting men's oaths, records their perjuries,
And over their shoulders writes consuming death.—
Dainer, delirious God, whose weary head

In dizziness round whirls, whose sleepy wand
Waves over Earth, over Heaven, scattering
Torpor universal, in his misty car
Dreamingly floats.—Muses and Valkyries,
Nornir and Elves, and fays, of grot, or glen,
Of storm, of hail, of rock, of flood, of fell,
Of mine, of mount, of springlet, stream, or lake,
Or mineral fount; (so have the fiends outparcelled
The world, that each independent king-ryke holds;)
The demon army swell: none, the least known
But with his leader equal in fixed hate
To creature as to Creator.—Woe were to man
Were not such malice restrained.—In martial pomp,
Under spread banners ranged, far glittering,
With helm, and spear, and shield, and armour of proof
The myriad masses, well marshalled by their chiefs;
Veterans, by the great contest severely schooled
Into lesson too strict to be forgotten soon,
In long drawn lines circuit the mysterious tree
And reverent and bare headed; (so their leader
His hollow priestcraft maintains) pray to the Fates
Urde, Verdande, Skullda, each, all of whom
Know the past, rule the present, into the future see
Deeply in the holy fountain Urder-brun,
Over whose width Ygdrasil's vast root curves,
Over whose waters knowledge and foresight sail,
Two stately swans arching their proud necks lithe,
Though covertly sneered at by the great high-priest.
Worship here paid, with pomp of outward shew,
Imposing observance, and ceremonial high,

With rapid step onward as fate-full and inspired
March the troops in their order; lively horn and trumpet-clang
To their march loud resounding: Vast Valhalla pours
Forth from her wide-spanning gates, tried warriors
Resolute, staunch, and true. As the war-steed
Left in old age to crop luxuriously
The high, the rich grass, unstinted in his corn,
And free to lave his hot sides in the stream;
At the known trumpet-call the stream forgets,
The stall, the savoury food, and neighing loud,
Paws trembling the earth, in youthful ardour snorts,
And scours o'er hill, o'er mead in the fray to plunge;
But by a fence curbed in, re-gallops round
And kicks defiance in the impassive air.
So rage they, strait withheld, and swear and storm,
At their envious fortune, from the prospect fair
Of wound, of bruise, of blood, to be shut out.
Shut out, they cheer the band, rejoiced to hear
That cheer by the gods returned: and now appear
Snow white the towers of high-built Himenborg.
Rocky, and stern, and huge, height upon height
Piled, frowning terror.—Winding from pass to pass,
Each pass more narrow, more precipitous,
Reach they the gate. Heimdaller, sheathed in arms,
Bestrides his gallant steed whose golden teeth
Champ on the golden bit, and frosted silver
Drop as foam on the glittering path; his dazzling sword
A welded sun-beam, and Giallar-horn,
Trumpet sonorous whose loud-rattling wakes
The heroes of Valhalla to their daily strife

Either hand grace. Courteous, as knight to knight,
The chieftains greet, and acclamations loud
Welcome the host, salute the garrison.
Proudly o'er the wide-spanning, they in fierce haste march
Loud tramping ; yet nor swerves, nor shakes the arch,
So wondrous in structure ; often visible
When rain and sunshine meet : hence by men called
Rainbow, but by the gods Bifrost, every ring
So with the others interlinked artfully,
Steadfast it stands, and to the end of time
Will stand, until the decree imperishable
That fixed it repealed shall be.—O'er the ocean foam
From it's high centre, far on either hand
Or to the Northern pole, or beyond the Line
Hot with the vertical sun, or to the East
On to Cathay, or to the dewy West
Far o'er the Atlantic, bounded by grey mist,
Dissolving clouds or isles that gaily bask
In the descending ray.—Nearer at hand
Lie the sister-islands, gems of emerald
In heavenly sapphire set. On their prey gloating,
Each to his fellow hungrily cries out
“ For such delightful lands who would not fight ” ?
Up to the centre, down the sharp descent,
Swiftly they hie, and, courtesies exchanged,
Heimdaller returns his post secure to man,
Lest, surprized suddenly, the realm lie waste.
Shrouded in clouds, upon whose rugged edge
Wondering the shepherd, rolling onward sees,
Warriors, and steeds, and banners flashing bright,

And crosses himself, and mutters many a prayer ;
Sink they to Abyrig, in thickening mist.—
Awaiting their Sultan, all in silence watch,
And the uneasy ban-dog whines, and howls.

[REDACTED]

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE SEVENTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X.

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

Raphäel induces Denulf to seek Alfred, then by a vision leads the King to repentance.

Nor has the Archangel from the sheer down height
Slackened his speed, as swift volition speed,
But over Aulre his resplendent wings
Closes and folds.—Cool, the fresh morning breeze
Drinks from his plumes unsatiating draughts,
And scatters around their incense ; laughing dews
Their glittering lamps re-trim ; glad Earth absorbs
All trace of carnage, lest Heaven's messenger
Her smile should flee, and profusely spreads around
Crocus, and primrose, cowslip, violet,

And loveliest daisy, flower of Anglia's hope,
Day's eye, Earth's glory : gold cups, and meek-eyed May,
Whiten the thorn, or prank the emerald mead.
Clear-tinkling rill, gaily-gurgling rivulet,
River wide spread, resounding cataract,
Loud-booming ocean, glade and forest deep ;
The blithe Spring-song of birds of every note,
The stag's wild bell, the placid low of kine,
The bleat of lambs ; all sounds that speak of peace
And rural happiness, with welcoming song
Hail the celestial habitant, unseen,
Yet by all felt :—no, not by all unseen :
Trembling a demon dark, uncouthly couched,
Flees from temptation's task and leaves his spells,
Spells of delusion the mind to overthrow
From her firm poise, and make a hell of Heaven,
A Heaven of hell.—Though a leaden, oppressive weight
Leaves him, the Outlaw nought yet sees around,
Nought hears around, nor feels he aught around ;
Though rainbow glories from the angel's feet
Deck the balm-breathing sward, though arching trees
Their buds pour forth profuse, and summer bowers
Canopy Winter.—Cool, the placid sky
Looks in the stream, and reflected streaks shoot along
In the wimpling current ; yet in the stream he sees
Nought but the bale-fire : that fatal bale-fire blazes
Until all is bale-fire, sky, forest, stream,
One supplicating flame. How many fearful scenes
Of slaughter, of the direst misery,
Of fleeing wretches, of pursuing fiends,

Red with their lust of blood, burthened with spoil,
Spoil of his own friends, his own friend's heart's dearest blood,
Blood for him poured, and he at distance safe
They in such peril, are in that bale-fire,
Are in that heaven a-blaze? His noble heart
Throbs even unto bursting.—Kynvit surely is destroyed,
So cries his secret soul, he knows not why;
But speaks not aught else that furiously spreading blaze
From tower, from fell, from flood.—His last, last hope,
The last fond hope of his soul, his last retreat,
His first step on to the ocean is destroyed,
And he stands brooding over that favorite tree,
That tree of his own planting, tree that he nourished,
His refuge from all ill. Tree of his hope
It has been smitten down; and fixed, he stands
So desolate, so rigid, so motionless,
The timid roe-buck stands a-gaze and deems him
A tempest-shivered stem.—Pitying, the Archangel
Stays not to weep; compassion to be useful
Must be in instant action, and he speeds
Swiftly to Denulf. Denulf attired he finds
And watching anxiously. That dreary night throughout,
When the clouds were all on fire, when fearful sounds,
Ominous sounds, as if Earth in terror saw
Terrors she dared not speak of, and in moans,
By the fitful gusts caught up, proclaimed her woe:—
Wulf had not pillowed his head throughout that night.
Wulf who, though an outlaw, is to him as a dear child
The dear child of his strength; of him he forebodes
Not good but evil.—True, Wulf's active arm

Never has been idle, has not hidden itself
In an angle-nook, or crouched a bed beneath :
True, Wulf has plundered, has with spoil returned,
Wulf has true friends, outlaws, yet bound to him ;
Wulf has whole days, whole nights, been on the track
Of the Pagan army : Wulf has smitten them
As heaven's lightning smites, himself unharmed ;
But through the last dreary night, Wulf has not seen
The hospitable roof ; and he looks piercingly
Into the misty distance, yet sees not
That active, that sinewy form. Each tree, each stake,
Still is a stake, a tree : Wulf it is not.
His untasted food there lies, untasted still,
Wulf is not there to partake it. Even the wife
Shrewish, and close, and hard, has begun to love
The outlaw, and continually asks impatiently,
If Wulf has not arrived. Sit they and watch,
Sit they and watch again, as if anxiety
Were the sole work of life.—Nor Raphaël
Suggestion neglects, thought by thought leading on,
Until, led by impulse irresistible,
Hastily the swineherd up his oaken staff,
Often in village broil used effectively,
Siezing, in search persists. Impression strong
Leads him in the angelic path. Amazed and sad—
Sorrow and apprehension have so wasted
That face of yesterday's knowledge, that but in garb
Wulf is some unknown man ; still standing fixed,
Still with staring eyes, the harrowing bale-fire seeing,
Still hearing the alarm.—The near approach,

The enquiring look, the tears fast-coursing down
The peasant's hardy cheek, the vision disperse—
Yet, grasping tight the friendly arm, bewildered
He pants, he gasps. “Or it was a fearful dream,
Or my brain wanders. Denulf, trembling Denulf?
Saw you then the bale-fire, hurriedly leaping along
From West to East? flying from hill to hill?
Calling on us for aid? Speak, speak, speak,
Saw you the bale-fire”? “Wulf, watching I have watched
All the live-long night, and have sounds unearthly heard
But no bale-fire have seen: loud, the howling storm
So strongly raged, that I the door had not oped
To aught but thy voice well-known; no other tongue
Would, to my shattered roof admission seek.
Well might it have been, the monks of Avalon
Held out their beacon for way-faring men
Across the wide waste of waters, now that flood
All and beyond the king's moor. But that it might
Allure plundering rovers, would that they would for ever
Such charity enact. Return I pray,
Spread is our frugal meal, you need it much,
And the brisk morning air freshens appetite”;
The peasant replies, and to him thus rejoins
The outlaw, more calm, more still, more resolute.
“So dreadful a tale this stream to me has told
My heart has sickened, my brain has whirled in fire;
I have seen spectral forms beckoning me down
Into the depth, and but that I seemed to feel
Some heavenly power restraining, in despair
The beckoning I had followed. From a tongue

Ceaseless and powerful, as within my very soul,
Hear I sad tidings :—slaughtered have been my friends :
I, I am their sworn avenger.”—There are times
When, but one word the whole past life recalls,
It’s miseries, it’s joys : one transient glance
Calls up vices, crimes, and sins : one slightest touch,
And the entire man is awakened : so at one word
The way-wearied wanderer’s feeble wail recalled,
His absent mind recalled, his searching look,
His authoritative bearing, when defiance
Glared from his eye in lightning, his ever ready,
His active hands, quick expedients, humility
Too graceful for a hind, and his repressed
Hard-struggling indignation, when rude insult
Galled him, aye even to the quick : The hunter’s toil,
The patient skill with which, when the conscious hart
Tasked all his instinct, by reason overmatched,
He safely harboured him : The archer’s lithe
Yet manly station : The audacious scorn
With which, at every weapon he would meet
High-boasting churls, and foil them at them all :
Skilful in all, in all things all excelling,
Recur to Denulf : he the right clue has found,
And courteously, for natural courtesy
Dwells in all honest minds ; and manlily,
Awakened the peasant, from his honest heart
Speaks to an honest heart : “ Wulf, there is learning
Which common men can reach, in schools untaught,
The learning of observation : there are marks
By which men of my class can as surely know

The truly noble, as the yeanling lamb
Knows it's own mother-ewe from the whole flock
I by that sure, untaught, instinctive sense
Know that you are not Wulf the robber-chief,
Nor yet a king's thegn are you, nor yet a priest,
Of priestly lore though full. That secreted book
By you so cherished, which your bosom lodges,
Which sleeps upon your heart, which your hands fills
When occasion offers, over which you bend
Often with eyes tears full, often which speaks
To your soul, whispering, calling up fierce looks
Kings might recoil from, has, with a tongue of truth,
Sworn to me that you are not priest, nor thegn, nor yet
A chieftain of lawless men. I, the King's swineherd,
A poor, poor man, do not reproach you that
You came a wanderer fainting to my door:
Poor though I am, yet, poorer than myself,
You had no food, and I had food to give ;
It was a common debt from man to man,
Dearer the debt, the more the adversity :
Still I could censure, though I love you Wulf,
That the poor swineherd has not yet acquired
Your truthful confidence ; yet still I love.
You have said friends ; friends are not lawless men :
Friend means, my equal, equal in heart, in soul ;
And these rude plunderers, nor in heart, nor soul
Are your equals, though in birth, or even in noble name
Out-rank you they might : yet you, you cannot have
Toward them the affection, which your bursting heart
Has uttered compulsively.—Pardon I ask not,

Nor flattered, nor angered, but with joy that gives
Radiance to homeliest features, that he has found,
In his abject poverty, one honest man
Who dares speak openly, dares his love manifest
By pure, plain speaking, the bold outlaw stands
Before the swineherd rebuked, rebuked yet glad.
“ When yet a little child, scant seven years old,
That treasure was my dear reward, honest reward
For labour as honest, labour which into my hands
Gave those advantages which you justly deem
High rank befitting.—My brothers and myself,
Pleased with the brilliant riot of the camp,
With the gallant daring of the hunter’s craft,
With the graceful bearing of the archer skilled ;
And, in our mirthsome war, more prompt the bow
To bend, or the lance to wield ; and little loving
The wearying bookman’s task, were but ill schooled.
Yet song I loved ; oft would I hang upon
The glee-man, and his glowing lay re-sing :
Re-sing, and gain honour as though it were my song.
Such song my fond mother loved ; that attractive book
With it’s gay painting, limned by men recluse,
In our task to tempt us on, offered she freely

She as delighted, whispered my grateful task.
Mine became the prize ; ever it has been mine,
Still mine shall be while I this being hold,
Although it so lightly has my trust betrayed :
Greatly for itself ; often has it solaced me,
Called back my childhood, when the world was gay,
When I was gay, when all around was gay,
But chiefly, Denulf,—you can hold with me,—
A mother's memory dear in your inmost soul,
It was given me by my mother ; and that dear mother—
The wife of Ethelwulph—Osburga—and I—
Am—Alfred—Alfred,—the King”—Upon his knee
The swineherd has sunk—but to his noble heart
Up the king has raised him,—honest heart throbs to heart
As that each would leap to the other, and hot tears,
(Ill fare the man who for such tears would blush)
Mingle upon each other's cheek.—The king at length—
“ Well may it be that the monks of Avalon
Their beacon-lights have raised, or it may be
Pagan marauders have affrighted them ;
But my heart is of Kynvit full : every shivering leaf,
Every bird that startled flies, adds to my hope,
Ministers to my fear.—Safe is my wife,
Safe are my children ; Stalwart Wilton men
Hold those loved pledges truly ; but I dread,
The reckless daring of Odun may the foe incite
Swords to measure with him. Hubba is on the coast,
Kynvit lies boldly exposed.”—“ Fear not, Sir King” !
“ Not king—Wulf still—such is my name with all.
And, or I boast in vanity ; the pagans

Iron-bound is that rocky coast, a rough hard shell
Holding delicious kernels. Hardily nurtured
Stout are Domnania's men, sturdy of limb
And stout of heart; more must the pirates be
Than fiends there to make good a foot-print. Pass we that.
Old grows the day, food you have not tasted yet."
"Food I crave not, hunger upon grief has fed,
And yet satiated feels. Worthy Denulf, leave me,
Love has extorted by it's earnestness,
The secret concealed through weary weary months
Of penury, of pain, of homely toil,
Of open, of strategied warfare: Denulf with thee,
Even with poor Gulldé (although the cakes were burnt,
Although I had hearty scolding, yet not too great
For my careless deserving) my secret is more safe
Than in my own guardianship: with grateful tiding
Wulf will 'ere long return." The swineherd, schooled
In natural courtesy, rejoinder checks,
And homeward turns; in solitary thought
Calmed yet still anxious: of the fearful night
For fearful it had been, although the swineherd shunned
Answer direct; each appalling circumstance
Weighs he without result; dread against hope

Calls up the Past : bids retentive memory
Disclose her vast accumulated stores ;
Treasures of experience, collected by industry,
Stored up by prudence, and for future use
By wisdom matured.—Evening's enveloping
Shade approaches not ; oft the way-faring man
Seems into the gloom forcing himself, finding every step
Denser and lonelier : so does the pensive king
Deep into the past time pierce, as though it were
From the present a refuge.—As at the birth of time,
When only mist the infant earth bedewed,
When rain knew not it's charge ; cliff-girt, an isle
Silent yet lovely, the ceruléan wave
Distains with verdure.—Over the laughing plains,
Deep in the forests, wide o'er the sandy shores
Man roves and is happy.—Waves of men succeed,
Races of gloom, of superstitious rites,
By priestly craft, under priestly tyranny,
Trampled into lethargy abominable,
Blood-stained, and terrible : an iron race
Though in themselves dark, the insulted diety
Avenging, destroys fouler darkness.— A feeble light
Follows their crushing tramp, halcyon in influence
The conqueror's fame it redeems ;—Yet that dies out
And the red glare of international war,
War of vindictive tribes, all strong to assail
Weak to defend ; as one man, the whole strength
Of combined empires fitted to repel ;
Divided but as a swarm of insects, off
To be swept by an urchin's hand ; the snow-white cliffs

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Stains red with blood. Red every brother reeks
With the blood of a brother ; proud each his name to spread
By sanguinary triumphs, conquests span wide,
Of momentary glory, the grave-mound
It's boundary, it's end.—Holy the light,
Such turmoil abhorring, flees to caves, to rocks :
Red, the right arm of vengeance is awaked,
And scourging upon scourging, tasks the child
Of Heaven's protecting love.—Over the waves bounding,
In tempest, in storm, in the fierce lightning's glare,
Or in the balmy zephyr's breath rejoicing,
Warriors, blue-eyed, from slimy marsh or sand,
Swarm on the heaving ocean, whose broad eye
Joys in his nurselings.—Scourging, purifying,
From the chill North-east, tribe upon adventurous tribe
Pouring, they still pour on, and conquering, on
They conquer still. As locust hosts they alight,
They climb, they overrun.—A smouldering cloud,
A hail of fire, of suffocating heat
A seven-fold furnace, all earth desolates,
With blood the wide sea fills.—From his bark leaping
Glories Cerdic the Saxon : prophetically foresees
Wessex her future kings. Arthur in him
An equal hero meets. Cerdic and Cealwin
His conquering strength, each on the Britons throws ;
An infant kingdom rises.—Yet not in peace,
Yet not in virtue, holds the stern progress on.
Strife, outrage, murder, ambition, fierce revenge,
Treachery, and unsparing, ferocious violence
It's ascending path defile.—The Lawgiver

Curbs in the restless, the cruel punishes,
Raises the abject, gathers his renown
From acts of peace, yet not declining war
When peace cannot be but in dishonour held:
The benefactors of his race among
The memorial of Ina lives. Satiated with rule,
To obscure life he sinks, in peace he dies,
Heaven's holiest blessing resting upon his head.
Cuthred the patriot; he from Ethelbald
Wrings the unrighteous exactions of tyranny,
And his country emancipates.—Nor patriot zeal,
Nor justice, nor truth, from sire to son descend.
Proud, contumelious, cruelly arrogant,
Sigebyrht's path disgust, contempt, hatred follow
And with dishonour brand him. Loyalty
From king to people he scorns: deridingly
Remonstrance thinks by a murderous hand to check:
Licenses outrage, encourages tyranny,
And, by oppression, deems his throne secured.
A generous, a loyal people, maddened by wrong,
Goaded by cruel injury, thrust him from
Rank undeserved: outcast, he flees, he skulks,
Pursuit evades; but an avenging hand
Following,—beneath a swineherd's knife he falls.—
In the murk darkness, stealthily creep along
Mistrust, and concealed revenge; and lustful love,
It's victim betraying, daring Cenred falls,—
Craving ambition, greedy thirst of power,
Unsparing, as more ignoble, avarice
Gripping on, clutching at her neighbour's wealth,

Though scarce to suffocation, ravages
Kingdoms, nor spares their kings.—Ethelritha
Widowed on her marriage day, her bridegroom slain
By her own father, in drear loneliness
Wretchedly, life ekes out :—dark, enduring remorse,
Press upon the murderer.—Offa, the conqueror,
The trampler down of kings, lies miserably
Squalling beneath the frown of Justice.—Eadburga,
Pallid, detested, systematic murderess,
Doubled sees her victims, by one poisonous cup.
Scorned and abhorred, in penury, as in vice,
An exile, and a beggar, that king's-daughter
Jezabel in crime, worse than Jezabel in shame,
Dies detested, in the open street.—From Offa the king,
From Offa the murderer, all that sprang, or yoked
With him; in misery, in most extreme distress
Cry, “Woe to ambitious kings” !—Woe, direst woe :
Not to themselves or their's the curse restrained.
Offa the murderer, Mercia the murderer's realm
Hence her fall dates : Egbert from her exacts
The penalty of blood ; sad the recluse,
Sheltering a fleeing king in her poor cell,
Remembers her father's crime, and weeps her woe.—

The king breathes hard, and as the vision rolls
Feels not himself quite guiltless, though happily
By revolting crime unstained : yet crimes he has,
And they have found him out.—An agonizing
Malady and tormenting, his whole frame contorts ;
Conscience, and dire disease, chastisers stern
Chastisement spare not. Ever unapt to learn.

When shall kings know, crimes are crimson crimes in them
As in those the meanest whom their besotted pride,
Their full blown-pride in their own height of place
Despises contemptuously.—Sit, sit, and drink
Humility, ye mighty men of Earth !
Know that hot vengeance slacks not, be her march
Rapid or slow, she swerves not from her mark.

The vision deepens.—Who ?—Who roll in blood ?
Who on war's roaring tempest ride along ?
Who from the fiery whirlwind pour down death ?
Who with the besom of destruction sweep ?
Who plough the earth in fury ? Who the harvest
Reap, of cruelty, of revenge ? Meteoric
Rages Cadwallon, rages Penda, Woes
Of Gwynedd ; Mona's pain, her misery,
Rolled back swoop down upon Deira,
Thunder over wide Bernicia :—Edwin's blood
Into his own rich realm sinks, but Edwin's blood
The desolators stays not, nor do the blood,
The shriek, the groan, the miserable anguish
The hoary pagan glut.—Sateless in bigotry
Triumphs his dark faith over the faith of light ;
Broad holocausts ascend,—Red, red in blood
Revels Cadwallon ;—In war Osric falls,
Suppliant the hands of Eanfred stay not slaughter,
Oswald is now the mark.—Hark ! Hefenfield
Joys over the fell warrior, wallowing. Blood he sought,
Blood has found him ; in his gore weltering,
Cold, stiff, and stark, repast of carrion birds
And beasts, outstretched he lies.—Yet on, yet on,

Furious Penda ravages, triumphs at Oswestroë,
Triumphs in Wessex, conquers in East Anglia,
Deaf to the supplicating cry for peace
Pounces upon Bernicia.—The eagle barks,
And the wolf howls, the ravening flood engulphs,
The yawning grave laughs.—Hela in joy has sixed
Her dark descending prey, foul demons shriek
Upon the howling storm; clench they, they tear
The pursuers of revenge.—Revengeful-war!
Bitterest among bitter curses, red to heaven
Glare thy horrible imaginings; demons with demons
Hold not such strife.—Who paces statelike on,
Sober and staid, serene in his dignity,
Affably placid, meek in his sovereignty?
Alfred of Deira, honoured, aye, beloved.
Nerved for any combat, in defensive war;
Strife, righteous only when in self defence,
He loves the arts of peace: though for war prepared
Not seeking war: upon his righteous reign
Heaven's glorious legions admiringly look down,
And plenteousness teeming, with rejoicing ease,
Peace the dove-eyed, and rich prosperity,
Religion the blessed with her beauteous train,
With honour, with splendour, wreathes his civic crown.
So treads he evenly onward; skilled to learn
As skilled to teach, of sacred wisdom full,
A clear broad light glowing effulgently:
Reverent to those who teach as Heaven has taught,
Firmly repelling man's assuming craft,
Prompt to obey the bidding of God's pure word,

Prompt to spurn down the priest-man's leaden rule,
His blasphemous pretension, or his curse ;
(Curse to recoil upon his own guilty head,
Who dares assume His stern prerogative
Who alone can judge righteously ;) steadily,
Blessing and blest he holds his holy way ;
And, sinking softly into the Saviour's rest,
Love, with true loyalty, weep o'er his tomb,
And angels waft him to his glad reward.

And the king blesses him, and fain would pray
That such end may be his own.—At Raphaël's word
Fleet off the mists which burthen memory :
And strong, and clear, and unmistakeable,
He renews his earlier life, or good, or ill.—
In beauty, in gentleness, in winning grace,
Superior to all he moves, even in infancy
Loving, by all beloved, each incident
Of earliest childhood, of boyhood, strongly marked
By an exalted nature. Truth and uprightness,
Honesty, the test of man ; honour, the test
Of Nature's nobly born, whate'er their rank,
God's own true noble men, who shrink from crime
As they would from dishonourable deed ;
Smile on his open brow, as in his soul
Enshrined they live.—Hot to resent a wrong,
More eager to forget ; prompt to efface
Transient ebullition by kindness perpetual ;
By all beloved, and in his honest heart
Cherishing, believing, trusting all, and living
Unsuspicious as undeceiving ; wisdom to acquire

Part of his very nature ; his whole energy
Absorbed and breathlessly alive when song
Tells of high deeds, of daring enterprize,
Of valorous atchievement : dearer lovelier
Than each, than all, in ardent piety
Dreading to anger Heaven, for that he loves
The God whom he reveres, he passes along
The path of life rejoicing.—Eager to dare,
He tames the fiery, the proud, the stubborn steed ;
Trains choicest hounds ; in glorious hunter-craft
His teachers outstrips, teaching where he was taught :
Yet into firmest friends his scholars converting.
Even his falcons love him ; sit more proudly
Upon his fist, and, as to give him joy
O'erclimb the heron, or the cushat strike
In her life-saving flight : his warrior weapons
Smooth, and adeptly balanced, rounded truly,
And trim, and clean, of his own form and making
Excel old craftsmen's work : in training true,
Gracefully, firmly, warriorly he sits
As one were both horse and rider, by one mind moved
Actuated by common impulse.—War his calling,
A warrior complete : fieldsports his choice,
A hunter born : the glee-man's art, his sport :
Who strikes the harp to a more joyous lay ?
Or bids the tuneful string discourse of war,
Of love, of revelry, with answering note,
More justly more melodiously ? His praise
On the lips of all ; every delighted eye
Roaming o'er youth and beauty, involuntarily

Awarding to him the distinction ; he alone
Unconscious, unelated, praises, loves
His self-elected superiors, emulates
In generous rivalry their high desert,
And in commendation garrulous, adds value to
His own deserving.—Yet he, the joyous pride
Of parents, of kinsfolk, in his sensitive soul
Temptation feels active, uncontrollable
By his own repressive spirit : often he pours
The fervent prayer, the live-long night throughout,
And in the fervour of that prayer, firm-nerved
Crushes ill thoughts in their outburst. Strongly his spirit
Struggles against sin, as God's arch-enemy,
Therefore his foe.—Persevering, nearly beaten down,
Yet in resolve secure, he fights the fight
Of affection, as of faith.—Noisome disease
Painful as perpetual, tries him ; persistently
To Heaven he yet flees in his confidence,
Pours out in prayer his soul :—while eagerly
His friends the chase pursue, a lonely cell,
A lonelier altar that prayer witnesses,
Witnesses trust, agony witnesses :—
In it's love, Heaven that wrestling prayer receives,
And as the hot tears roll down his pallid cheek,
Whispers of peace, of mercy : he arises
Strengthened, relieved, assured.—Who speaks of love ?
Who to the blushing morning pours his plaint ?
Who to gray evening tells his anxiety ?
Who on the midnight air his fond vow breathes ?
Who in his bridegroom pride, leads glorying

Peerless Ethelswitha? around whose feet joyously
Maidens dance gleeful? and upon whose heads
Rains down a whole people's blessing?—Goodlier pair
Since the first pair, never trod rejoicing Earth,
Never met in truthful, trustful wedlock bound.—
The mirth, the joy, the song, the gleesome dance,
The laugh, the shout, the bounding revelry
Waken delight, and love's rejoicing Spring
Strews o'er the sward fairy flowers nectareous,
Pours forth all her volumed harmony, and bids
All nature to her festival.—Profusely
Spread over mead, over lawn, and in palace halls,
Proud the feast bids all welcome. Sparkling ale
Floats around, and mead, and racy metheglin burthen
The hospitable board :—day unto night,
And night to day, repeat unweariedly
The joyous rejoicing.—Exulting in his joy,
Honouring his noble guests ; glowing the youth
Lifts the Remembrance-horn, twining it's curves
His manly arm around, and raising high
The token of good will :—Bidding them all
Right welcome to his feasting ! full the brim
Kisses his lip, mirth-breathing—he falls—he writhes—
In agony he writhes—a deadly cloud
Stains his broad brow—wan are his strained cheeks,
Tightly clench his teeth, his hands, his every limb,
Twine in death-agony :—Away—away—
Away festive gorgeousness !—weep, bitterly weep,
Daughters of Wessex !—Smitten in his strength,
In his young manly strength, even in the blossoming

Of nuptial happiness, before the gaze
Of his bewildered people,—torment, misery
Spread their rough pallet over the bridal couch.—
Sorrow, in her height of glory made desolate,
Watches and stays her breath, lest breathing slay
The husband of her hope.—Stern was that blow.—
Aghast, pale, tremblingly the chastened king
Gazes upon the vision, fixed, absorbed
In the terrible recognition.—On, onward rolls
The accusatory scroll.—Stern though that blow,
Stern though the lesson so severely taught,
Heaven in it's mercy tempers the rebuke ;
And in connubial bliss, connubial hope
Rich is his solace :—nor is studious life
Less grateful, less beguiling. Ardent to learn,
Resolute to encounter, resolute to overcome,
Pain smiles beguiled, and interested in the joy
Looks on the labour, and forgets to scourge.—
The cry for help loud rings ; in bright arms sheathed
Beards he the pagan host, and with his king
Holds them at defiance.—From the threatening
Shrink they appalled ; the Mercian realm is saved.
Yet not long the storm sleeps.—Suddenly it falls
Sweeping the fair fields of Berroscire.—Alternately
Christians and pagans, war's fearful flood oppose,
Roll back the threatening waters, and surmount
The destroying torrent.—Host, host assailing
Pour the invaders :—Host, host repelling
March the defenders :—Over Æscedune
Spread the rabid legions, with eager eyes devouring

Meadows, health-clad, silver streams drinking up,
Swelling hills trampling down.—Impatiently
Hot-blooded the warrior chafes, his rage unleashes
And stains the grey thorn with blood.—Charge upon charge
Boldly the Pagans repulse ;—charge upon charge,
Daringly the Christians renew :—The battle swerves,—
Angels defend, fiends in the encounter mix,
Howling and shrieking.—Plunder, with Thirst of blood
Urge the invaders :—As a wild boar headlong
Rushes impetuous Alfred, cleaving down
Earl Sidroc to the chine ; the younger Sidroc
Leaping forward, the corpse bestrides ; his brown sword whirls,
His blue helm rings, around his dizzy head
Dim faintness swims ; yet but a moment, and,
Crashing the broad axe smites ; through shield, through mail,
Goring,—out issues life.—A milder fate
Had thine been, brave Earl Sidroc ! had the prince
Thy kind heart known.—Rest, in thine honour rest
Earl Sidroc, noble youth !—Shield against shield,
Weapon with weapon clashing ; helmet splits,
Mail rends, and darkness and confusion hide
Deeds, of renown deserving.—None can sieze,
None can the dead bear off.—Barriers in war,
Now barriers in death, the two stout Earls
Onset repel : on high a blackening ridge
Rises of dead of dying :—Halfdan leads,
Nor Bægsceg lags ; ferocious wolves and grim
Down down they sweep :—wearied the Christian band
Had reeled, had retreated,—Valorous Ethelred
Pious as faithful, on the instant charges ;

Charging on the instant, the impetuous rush
Heavily in all it's energy sweeps on :
Full-mailed warrior over warrior rolls,
Staggered, o'erthrown, o'erwhelmed. Yet not in flight
Safety dishonoured seeking, Obsbern, Fræna, Hareld,
Earls tall and strong and daring, the surge breast,
The tide of slaughter turn : yet, as huge rocks
Once loosened, tremble, sway, then thundering fall,
So in the confluent wave of war these fall
Smitten, or by Alfred, by Athulf, or Ethelred,
Terrible even in death.—Affrighted, away
Flees Halfdan, his followers flee. Slung back their shields,
Through vale, over hill they flee. Missile showers sharp
Dishonest wounds open :—Shrieking, fast they flee,
Fast fleeing, aloud they shriek :—even weary night
Stays not their haste, nor morning's blushing light
Cheers up distress, until in Rœdinga's walls
Cowering, their shame they hide.—Yet not the storm
Blows over, or even is hushed :—at Basengas
Ashamed step the Christians back.—Every hostile shore
Swarms ; even as bees thick-warping on the wind
On Wessex alight they.—As tumultuous waves
Driven by a South-east wind, strongly surge on,
Wear the hard rock, into the tall cliff eat,
And the strand level down ; so, wave on wave
Of host on host, on the devoted land
Roll, roar, are broken—are broken, yet roll on.
Rocks, cliffs of warriors, at the last outworn
Sink in the common wreck ; every brilliant victory
But illustrious defeat.—Again resounds

Deep the battle-cry and harsh.—That harsh cry hears
Mortune, and trembles.—Echo amid the hills
Wandering laments, her inward grief nourishing.
Sadly and slowly, along the Ridgeway borne,
Borne by a brother, pious Ethered
Over sanguine plain, over vale, with languid eyes
Seeks, sees not hope, and in death closes them ;
And Alfred groans : yet onward by heavenly aid
Led, by hard trial disciplined, by defeat
Schooled, by privation taught how to endure;
With doubting, desponding hands, from entreating hands
A thorn-set crown he takes, a sceptre accepts
Wreathen with cares, with woes ; to wrestle hard,
To wrench them from a giant, whose fierce gripe
Clings to one, and clenches the other.—Abendune
Despoiled, her monks slaughtered ; Wanatage insulted ;
Lambourne endangered ; aroused, the regal lion
Glares, his mane shakes, laughs at the spear, the lance,
Holds the sword ^{of} defiance.—daunted, the hunters turn,
Turn,—re-inforced take heart :—at bay he stands
Scorning to retire whatever be their strength,
And, by his noble bearing scared, they halt,
Consult, retreat,—Wet Guilou's willowy banks
Of their fear bear record.—Wessex is made free,
Is honoured in Alfred, her all-honoured king.—

Peace, holy peace the wounds of war heals up,
And plenty the blithesome, with her beauteous train
Joy and contentment, bless the enfranchised land.

Wealthy in wedded bliss, the hours pass on
Unnoted in their happiness, the smile,

The lisp, the gay infant's gambol more endear
Home and home-comforts : the far distant strife
Is but as summer-thunder, adding zest
To our own safety. Yet not the active king
Passively sits ; the tempest as yet far off
May on the winged lightning swiftly career
And plunge down to the rock : on every height,
On every headland of far-seeing reach,
Armed bands and beacon-lights, with prescient skill
Selected, watch over ocean's horizon line,
And all the Northern-March strictly sentinel,
Watching Mercia, bordering Wessex : nor on the West
Is vigilance asleep ; every internal camp
Is duly garrisoned, and the king sits
In Wilton :—So Arachne having stretched
Her tight-strained cords, securely intermeshed,
Each one all-sensitive, with subtle life
Instinctively re-answering, her sentient touch
Tests each vibration, and holds all in check.
Orderly his home arranged, the master's eye
Knowing and the master's hand guiding all that moves.
So is the land meted, all for defence of all,
All for oversight of all ; mechanically beautiful
But with distrust too pregnant, itself destroying
Even by its best success, blessings converting
Into curses severest, none to be happy but
As the king pleases ; made, in the king's own way
Discontentedly happy :—affection, reverence,
Die lingeringly under the finger of interfering
Regulating kindliness, and in their ashes

Breed ill-will and disgust ; loving the king
Detesting the overlooker.—Yet he loves,
Dearly he loves his people, only wrong
In tyrannously doing right.—He, ardently
Glowing with piety, truly pious men
Seeks to instruct his people, sorrowing to find
Ignorance hidden under a priestly garb,
Gabbling by rote, to him a tongue unknown
To his hearers as unknown ; fit priest, fit flock.
Nor ermined Justice sees her awful seat
Less vilely shamed, nor is that Augéan filth
Less difficult to cleanse.—Cruelly, though justly
Incensed, he slaughters, where the hangman's whip
Had cured not irritated ; and indignation,
Glossing their crimes, detests their punisher.
Surrounded by nobles, untaught, warlike men,
Loving their dogs, their hawks, their high-bred steeds ;
Readier the stag to track, the boar to spear,
Or in pastime-fight to tilt, than to hold discourse.
Admiring the pictured book, looking in contempt
On the unassuming bookman ; loving the lay,
Hating to read it ; he disappointed sits
Watching his own lone lamp, and wearing out
The meridian of night.—Laborious skill,
Honourable in kings, as means to the glorious end
Of better ruling in their high sovereignty,
To him a consuming care. Watchfulness, weariness,
Seclusion, incessant disease, as caged wolves
Worry each other : scorn and arrogance,
Right regal vices ; impatience, petulance,

The bookworm's tormentors, upon his spirit prey :
Friends keep aloof, squalid beggars shun his gate,
The outcast, the oppressed refrain to cry ;
Justice becomes deaf, the rich man, and the proud,
Upon the lowly trample, unarraigned,
Unpunished by their king. In pity, the rebuke,
In threatening, the vengeance of the God
By whom kings rule, from a fond friend's lips fall
Unheeded, even contemned :—Self-willed, in agony
Flees he as from conscience, wanders, avoids, secretes,
Fighting in stubborn pride against himself,
Trusting to conquer self by self-confidence,
Struggling up, but again to fall, struggling he sinks,
Weakened to become yet weaker. Pitied, though dreaded ;
Obeyed, not loved ; bowed to, but yet despised ;
Throned in calamitous prosperity,
He acts the king, not rules : or, be it he rules,
Rules but to be abhorred.—Hark ! hark to the sound
Of the battle rushing on ! Werhamme surprized,
The lion shakes himself : threatening his roar
Calls up all warriors : Wessex has but slept,
Wessex is not dead.—Guthrun, Amund, Oskytul,
Had not yet felt his swift sword's biting edge,
Seeing, they evade it :—by all their gods they swear,
Swear the warrior's binding oath, by the honoured proofs
Of their own manhood ; swear in the Christian wise ;
And, breaking oath and pact, in slumber slay
Treacherously the king's horsemen, sieze upon and hold
Caer-wisc.—Excited into high resolve,
Lashed by the peril into energy

He bids the subjected main a huge fleet bear,
He bids that fleet arise.—Foreseeing all,
Arranging all, around every port or strand,
The forests fall, down thundering ; every strand
Lays down the stout keel, curves the out-arching ribs,
Hews crooked knees, frames the compacting beams,
Smooths the lithe plank, tight caulks the close-meeting seams,
Steps the light, taper mast, tautens up the fixed,
The running rigging secures, and to the winds
In their broad grandeur, spreads the snowy sails ;
Fit wings for such dragons ; longer, loftier,
More graceful than ever had looked into the wave
In their proud beauty. Alfred's workmanship,
Alfred's conception :—not for idle pomp,
Not to display the power of a king,
Boastfully vain ; but of necessity,
Made for a purpose, built to be of use ;
Fleet as the swift, that buoyant rides the air,
Strong as the vast whale who the North Sea braves.
On the high fore-deck, stand the warriors armed :
Cherily the mariners man the sweeps outstretched ;
Proudly each chieftain guides the directing helm.
Haelenœ, Portasmuthe, Antona's gulph,
Lentune and Tweonambourne, and every creek,
And every bay, and every beach, and cove,
Forth speed the gallant armament :—Surprised,
Ocean rejoicing hails the wondrous birth.
Foreseeing her future fortune, stream and flood,
Join to his deep, hoarse song, their carols shrill ;
Pleased the blue Heaven Anglia's first navy hails,

And dull Earth, warmed into enthusiasm,
High claps her hands and peals her glorying.
Isca, hears trembling, the far re-echoing shout ;
And glorious that shout is, of victory full,
Of honour, of high renown : long, long to live,
Long to be applauded by every ocean isle,
By every admiring continent. Ominously
It rolls around Caer-wisc :—Dark the Pagan fleet
Warps storm-beaten, water-soaked, heavy. As a gos-hawk
Stoops to a swan, so upon that doomed fleet
Bears down Thorkill and Wessex. Stricken, they heave, they roll,
Ships sink, men drown ; the whole North-sea laments
And chants her deep dirge over bloated kings :—
The stars fight against the Pagans ; winds and waves
Another fleet swallow.—Bees exasperated,
Their hive o'erthrown, on neck, on face, on hands
Settle, and sting ; even so, ferociously
Pour along the Saxon yeomen, ride down, hew down, maim,
No quarter giving, none craving.—Their loss so sore,
The Pagans swear again :—yet again, his forgiving heart
True to his own uprightness trusts again,
Leaves their road open ; backward wheels his troops,
Watches them, still in hope that very shame
Will whisper them to be unperjured.—Hope, well pleased,
Sings in her honourable confidence ;
Many towards Mercia march ;—of their faith assured
Rests he in Wimbourne, and his warriors rest
Each in his home, at high Mid-winter tide
Holding in religious joy their festival.
Again, onward the Pagans march.—Who rides in haste ?

Who rides so hotly? Who in the King's Hall
Gasping stands, breathless? Who tells of Cyppanhamme
Devastated, plundered? Who from the fiery wrath,
Who from the indignation shrink appalled?—
“Speed with the cloven shaft, at Andeofre
Tryst we in arms.”—East, West, and North, and South,
Fly the war-tokens; climb the mountain brow,
Dash through the river, thread the valley depths,
Plunge into the forest.—Wessex, be up in arms!
Wessex, to the onset!—The watch-fire has died,
The beacon been lonely left, dry the grass whistles
Throughout the deserted camp:—Sullenly, gloomily,
Surlily, warriors sit: forth no sword leaps;
Rusted the mail, and battered in, the helm
Hang on the time-stained wall.—This the last blow
Has smitten dead all hope:—ghastly despair,
With clenched hands, and motionless eyeballs, straining
Into vacuity; and maddened terror
Fleeing from all she sees, or hears, or thinks,
Are all that live in Wessex.—Save his House-thegns
None their tryst keep.—Yet the king urges on
To Bedgwin,—there, none to meet but Leofric
And his own thegns.—Every copse, and holt, and down,
Swarms thick with the Pagans: Over Chute, through Savernake,
Skirting the swelling plain; through Pewsöe vale,
Through Pewishamme, through Broedine; every tree,
And every stock, and every stone conceals
A foeman.—Mercia—Mercia has disgorged
Legion upon legion: Caer-wisc, East Anglia,
The huge host swell, moving onward.—Nor word, nor look;

Or how, or where, each in panic terror flees
Forgetting, deserting their king.—Cleaving, his sword
Splits helm, and scatters brains. Another blow
Cuts through a shoulder ; the carcase fills with blood,
Rushes out the howling soul. A third man feels
Keen the broad blade gride through the crashing spine,
There stay, there break.—Headlong in furious haste
Flees the King, scared ; nor draws bit till his ears
Leave the wild yell behind.—A moment he stands ;
Throws off his arms, his faithful steed turns loose,
And plunges into the forest.—Dim—a dim gleam—
Noteless save in such darkness, weak, transient,
Evanescent, now brilliant ; as a fisherman's
Boat upon the heaving ocean, now swallowed down
Into the black trough, now poised upon the rolling
Edge of the heaped up wave, from the shore seems
Lost now, now distinctly clear : so creeps, creeps on,
Feebly the fire, persevering, devouring on
Surely, now speedily—through gorse, through fern,
Through matted underwood, up saplings tall,
Springing from stem to stem, wide, wide around
Blazing brands scattering, in fierce might sweeping,
Unsparing, far-spreading, onward the cruel fiend
Grasping in giant arms, and hurling down
The growth of ages, increasing with increased,
Ever increasing strength, roaring pours along
One fiery deluge, surge and spray all fire.
Warring, the winds waked from the death-like sleep
Of their sheer exhaustion, in rapid, in fitful gusts
Their sinewy strength assay ; then to the spoil

Rush wildly, rush furiously.—Clamouring, the flames
Outclamour the warring winds ; warring, the winds
Howl in acerbity of wrath, groan, shriek,
Wail, yell in ferocity.—The stately pine
As a willow wand snaps :—Graceful, the pensile ash,
Wont with it's beauteous 'tresses on the breeze
To wave, to sway, to float ; withered up, scorched,
Blasted, blackened, shrunken, on the magnificent
Beech in his grandeur, into ashes smouldering
Shrivels, wastes, falls.—Offspring of ages past,
In youth, in erectness, in beauty, proudly rearing
Nobly his front in all the winds of heaven,
'Ere the dense forest the green sod overspread ;
Bowing his mighty arms in majesty,
Joying in storm, in whirl, in hurricane,
And, as a sturdy wrestler, firmly planting
Strong-knit his limbs, as the storm-demon's strength
Strives to uproot him, the gigantic stem,
Giant before Druid, with superstitious rite,
Had, in trees worshipped God, scornfully, fearlessly,
Indignantly looks down.—Volumed, the fire
Pauses, draws back, as from Marius' frown
Awe-smitten the assassins ; then, energy collecting,
Launches in his might the mighty bulk against.—
So enormous Python on some huge elephant
Fastening, with his whole length instantaneously
Twisting, compressing, every coil tightening,
Crushes flesh, splinters bone : hard struggling,
Turgidly expands the brute his iron-bound sides,
Stamps down his ponderous limbs ; with goring tusks,

With twining proboscis, the tortuous monster rips,
Mutilates, stretches:—Vain his resistless strength,
Vain his unconquered spirit; life ebbs fast,
And, his assailer maiming, down he falls:
So falls the Monarch Oak.—Victorious,
Surge over surge, the crackling, the snapping flood
Continuously rolls, or bounds, or springs.
Nor swamp, nor marsh, nor bog, nor rill, nor lake,
Against such foe fit fence, lake, stream, rill, marsh,
All flame, all fire, but urge the fevered thirst,
Edge but the appetite:—fleeing, as fled
Erstwhile no beast of chase, trembling the deer
Tumultuously rush; newt, snake, fox, wolf,
Panic-stricken, every instinct all suppressed,
Save the instinct of self-preservation, madly strive
Heap over heap to escape:—escape cut off,
One furious, flaming girdle hems them in.
Pyre piled on pyre, in agony convolved,
Inextricable; straining, their eyeballs burst
With suffering wrought to intensity; timid or savage
In one vile ruin commingled.—Leagues, leagues beyond,
Outstretched in length, in breadth; ascending far,
Measureless in height, one vast, vast, sea of fire,
Far, far out-spreads; one surge of rolling smoke,
Cloud upon cloud; heaven's deep concavity
One vaulted furnace heat; hills, plains, all light,
Glaringly light, pebble from pebble distinct
As crimes in the Day of Judgment.—Breathlessly
Outflees he the fleetest: into the slimy fens
Leaps he,—he plunges, flounders, wades, or swims,

As swimming, wading, floundering, his flight aid,
Reaching dark Sealwude, by heavenly power saved
From the horrible conflagration, there he sinks
On the earth prone and exhausted.—Weary night,
And weary day and night, footsore, he crawls
Maimed by the frantic energy :—Through ditch, through dell,
Shrinking from his feeble shadow ; berries, roots,
His miserable food ; his parching thirst slaked
From pools putrescent, the ground inhospitably
Hard, and ice-bound his bed ; hunger-gnawn, famishing,
Craving relief ; in trembling, the shattered door
Is barred up against him : his apprehensive sense
Hears upon his head curses both loud and deep
Imprecated, he the author of their woes :
And corpses lie stark, stripped, festering round the hut.
Onward, whither war in blood has not yet stalked,
Children, and curs, yells, outcries, sticks and stones,
The fleeing beggar pursue.—On, on, still on,
Weary, and worn, and wasted ; swimming stream,
Wading through bog or marsh, weak-staggering
Reels he,—he falls—amid a herd of swine
Stretching himself out to die.—A deep, dense mist,
A dense, a cheating mist, thickly round us wraps,
And we step, stumbling still as every step
Leads us still more astray, vainly, proudly confident,
The more wrong, more right we deem ; when,—suddenly
Bright the sun bursts through the deceiving haze,
And on the edge of a sheer precipice
Hangs our last step.—So stayed, so shuddering,
So terribly forewarned, trembling the King,

Awed stands, stands fixed :—The glimmering, flickering,
The bewildering marsh-light of vain-confidence,
In intellect, in genius, in skill, in strength,
In courage, in valour, in rank, in dignity,
Treacherously has been his guide ; and, yawning the gulph,
Threatning, confounding, and unfathomable,
Gapes.—Oh, who can paint his mind's wild agony,
The torture of his remorse ? His fancied strength,
A bruised, a broken reed ; his fancied virtues,
Unsubstantial, hollow ; all his fancied fame,
Disgrace, shame, misery :—Sighing, he groans,
Groaning in his whole soul's anguish, he bitterly
Sees all his errors, his vices, his crimes, his sins,
And repents bitterly, yea, bitterly,
His people's wrong, his people's suffering,
Noisome harvest of his sowing.—On the earth,
Pallid, outstretched, weeping, and struggling
With woes too great for utterance, inaudibly,
Yet by God's own ear heard ; he feebly prays :—
“ Mercy ! Lord, mercy !—O ! all-righteous God,
Hear my repentance, pardon my foul sin,
For his, for his sake who became man to save
A guilty, a guilty world.—It is his blood,
His blood alone, me from thy wrath can save,
And I plead that righteous blood, that holy blood,
The cleansing blood, the sanctifying blood,
Of thine own son.—Pity me, pardon me :
Make me, O ! make me, in my penitence
Instrumental to thy good ; thine instrument
For the welfare of my people. Make me, Lord !

Their friend, their father. As thou, as a father
Lovest thy children, make me intensely love
All these thy children, and devotedly
Wear out myself in benefitting them.
Poor, poor, poor recompence, for all the ill,
Which at my hands they have suffered. In thy strength,
In thine own strength, the strength of my Lord God,
The Lord God of my fathers, I surrender
To their service every energy, forego
All selfishness, all pleasure, all advantage,
For their advantage: in my kingly duties,
Should'st thou again me to my throne restore,
Throne only safe in a confiding people's love;
Bid me be firm, be watchful, be resolute,
Nor in myself to neglect, to weary, to oppress,
Nor suffer others to pillage, or to oppress,
Or the meanest, or the highest: bid me steadily
Hold equal the balance of justice: bid me right
The injured, bid me rigidly trample down
The tyrant noble, or the tyrant thrall:
And for my country, for thy favoured land,
The land thou hast so wonderfully led
In thy mysterious path of destiny;
Bid me, well pleased, my latest breath pour out,
If my death will be her life.—Yet, above all,
In lustrous honour, or dreariest wretchedness,
Radiant in glory, or deep-steeped in woe,
Lead me myself to devote to thee, my maker,
My preserver, my Lord God; the terrible,
Loving, forgiving, the merciful Lord God.

So let me die, or live, as life, or death,
Best shall advance thy glory, best shall shew
Thou, thou alone art the True, the Eternal God,
Holding all nature, all nations in thy hands,
Dethroning kings, and bidding kings bear rule,
Exalting, or depressing, peoples, tongues,
And multitudes, and nations :—this prayer hear,
Hear this my penitence :—O ! be to me
My Saviour, my Redeemer : to my people
Be father, be benefactor, Lord, and God.”—
Sustained, confirmed, and grateful, up he rises
As in renewed nature, vivified
By Heaven’s rich blessing on his high resolve.
Humbly he knows himself, and in that knowledge
Arises from his knees, the greatest, the wisest,
Most noble of all kings ; King of himself.—

Slowly towards home he moves ; that glorious home
Wherein he has learnt a lesson, seldom taught,
A lowlier Christian, and a better man.—

Lovingly the Archangel every step regards,
Adoringly bows, and pours out with eloquence
His elevated joy : Angelic choirs
Swell the glad hymn, and every listening Earth,
And Suns, and Systems, in their joy rejoice.



A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X.
BOOK THE EIGHTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X.

B O O K T H E E I G H T H.

Alfred assembles his companions, unites with Duke Ethelnoth in the fastnesses of Sealwoud, rescues Ethelwitha, defeats and slays the Sea-King Amund.

Nor is the Arch-Enemy slumbering: he who moves
Invisibly even among his kindred fiends,
Watching their labours, as if their enmity,
Their hatred, their revenge, were insufficient
To goad them on in harm-doing; in set watch,
Prudently distant, that angelic eye
Should not his presence detect; still stealthily
Drawing nearer, yet nearer draws, as the loved task
Intensely employs Raphaël. So intensely,
Trembles in the agony of rage repressed,

The arch-tempter, as the net, mesh after mesh,
Lifted, unfolded, is by Repentance thrown
Into that gulph, wherein all sins forgiven
Are buried, are strictly concealed, never again
To rise, not even at the Judgment ; shut down, sealed,
By God's own atoning blood : seal, that his fiends,
Nor all his strength, beneath which worlds would crush
As empty rottenness, were not his hatred curbed ;
Nor all the strength of Sin, of Death, of Hell,
His offspring, his tormentors, ever shall break.—
Smiting his forehead he flees ; not in despair,
In ungovernable rage. His haste so abrupt ;
The Archangel turns. Withering terrors, hastening,
From his indignant eyes, scourge, scourge the fiend,
As he had felt hell's furies at his back ;
Or worse, the enraged lightning of God's wrath.
He with wrath raving, intense, his malignity
Yet more intensely deepening, he devises
How to convert defeat into victory.
Difficultly devising, long as fruitlessly ;
Wanderingly rolling, his eyes fix in watchfulness
At length, over a little band of travellers
Wayworn and weary :—pleased to delightsomeness,
Forth over the shoulders his impatient wings
Flow ; down the wind he hurries, into the camp
Sinks, and transformed, there as a fate-ful dream
Stalks around Guthrun : stalks, a disturbing mist
Thick with a thousand fancies hideous,
Filling the benumbed brain, to throw off sleep struggling.—
In confusion yet more confusedly intangible

Wavering it condenses ; seeming, though indistinctly,
A noble lady, in her aspect queenly,
In her affection lovely, fondly clasping
Close two fair children : change they into a swarm
Of peasants threatening, sticks, staves, brandishing :
Now are the heavens with hurtling missiles thickened ;
Now falls overturned his tent ; blood, smoke, and fire,
Girdle him ; he wakes, pants, into the uncertain
Chill dawning light, looks out. He sees, or thinks
He sees, in blear bewilderment, the land
Adown the hills moving : warily shaking himself,
Questioning his cheated sight, the wavering
Line becomes fixed, is unchanged.—Although a dream,
Disturbed that dream leaves him ; thoughtfully awhile
He pauses, is resolved.—“ Hasten Amund hither” !
Nor need he wait ; interrupting further speech,
Amund, himself disturbed, awakened, armed ;
(He too had dreamt of surprise, of ghastly wounds)
Enters uncalled : To whom his brother chief :
“Amund it misgives me much that some deadly ill
Is imminently impendent :—On all hands,
From every quarter ; wood, or hill, or stream,
Hear we of Wulf, never see him :—Not an outpost
But is scared in or slain ; the wise witch-wives
Taste the black blood, swear it the work of fiends,
Of accursed of Christian fiends, swart ugly dwarfs
Their power to bind defying.—Wulf plundered Caune,
Wulf plundered Æscetun ; nor thegn’s, nor peasant’s.
Hut, house, or castle, that with us has leagued,
But Wulf, and Wulf, and Wulf ;—all around us Wulf

Slaughters or herries, until our warriors staunch,
And true, and revengeful, shrink ; and 'ere the murk
Thorny rod of Dainer, waves Hrimfaxi on
To cool the mist of night, they whisper of Wulf:
Dozing they dream of Wulf ; waking, shriek out " Wulf !
Wulf is upon us " !—until every inch of land
Seems yeanning with this Wulf.—Dislodge will I
This Christian devil or dwarf, whate'er he be ;
And fire and devastation soon shall make
All desert : by loneliness better fortified,
When not a tuft of grass a toad can shade,
Than by trench or earthen wall. Glory you crave,
Be this your glorious task : Go to it quickly,
Do it effectively.—You, Southward hence
To Stanheng plain, thence Westward to the sea :
That done, the monks of Maildhelmsbyrig shall
Feel the temper of our blades. Kynetune, Cæreg Combe,
Coshamme, and Brædanford, and Clafertune,
And Bathanceaster ; each mead, each rolling Down
Shall roll into Abona blood, nothing but blood,
And so that devil shall flee. Chant we aloud
Solemn Mass to Hilda, until the shaven crowns
Learn newer music."—And in like merriment
Amund replies and briefly, but too well
Pleased with rapine, and plunder, to delay the feast.—

Watchful, the Archangel has not unheeding passed
Satan's expression, his lingering, or his speed,
Nor unapt been to conjecture his resolve,
Nor slack to mark the uprising of the host
In precipitate eagerness.—He summons straight

Abdiel and his veteran legion, lest the fiend,
Deeming him unadvised, should with his host
Dare open inroad, and for open inroad need
Sharper rebuke than mere indignant frown.
In order due, the veteran band forthwith
With shields close-compacted, and with ported spears.
Rest upon a sun-beam over Camalate ;
Whose high top never yet, by the morning flushed,
Glowed so delightedly, so resplendently.—

Meanwhile, their frugal meal, with appetite
Which makes the poorest man richer than his king,
Alfred and Denulf despatch ; attended by
The house-wife, who with awkward ceremony,
Declined by the king in vain, strives to efface
Memory of her sharp tongue, ill yet concealing
Uprising vexation that her dull peasant lord,
Should that noble nature have known, in tattered weeds,
Which her own higher discernment had o'erseen.
The unworthy petulance transient ; soon the King,
Happy now in himself, is happier
In seeing rich happiness around him glow ;
And blither hearts never met, nor joyous smile
Ever beamed so gaily as in the swine-herd's hut.
Happiness, breathing, chastened happiness,
And mirth, with eyes glancing mirth : equals in truth,
Equals in pleasure, all are friends fast-sworn
Or in want, or wealth overflowing.—Or e'er the sun
Over Summertune arising, has exhaled
Beyond the shadows wide, the crisped dew,
Both ready are for toil.—Commotion strange

Even the swine affects ; all are astir,
All with erected heads snuff the cool air,
And around Denulf congregate, as that joy
Contagious were : curiosity awakened,
Seeking some cause for the unwonted glee
Of their herd-man and the outlaw, they confer
With Sauer their sage controller, poor beast, he,
Aged, worn out, unfit but to sit and bask,
And as he sits to roll down, then up to start
Ashamed of his weakness, and stubbornly resolute,
But only to roll down again ; leaps, capers, barks,
Fondles Wulf's hand, bounds up his cheek to lick
So like to his own dogs, that instantaneously,
Home, all it's winsome moments, all it's loves,
Hopes, griefs, anxieties, joys, pleasures, cares,
Flood his full heart. Day-dreams of memory,
Fears, terrors, anguish ; all that to a King
And to a man can plead, with earnest tongues
Speak :—he looks back :—homes now are desolate,
O'er whose strewn-floor, in Yule-tide merriment
Lightsome the grey-beard with the grand-child danced ;
And laugh, and song, and jocund revelry
Rang round the ingle-nook : how sad, alas !
Now in their loneliness.—Delay is crime,
Wessex shall yet be free.—With eager haste
Snatches he bow and lance ; tightly he girds
His tunic of leather, of proof to intercept
Danger of vital wound ; buckles he on
Tightly his hunting knife, and clenching hard
His trusty tough buckler, grasping both their hands

As though his soul were in the friendly gripe,
To Heaven he commends them. At the homely phrase
Tears start—it may be for ever.—Resolutely
He darts off at full speed, lest he should choke
With another, “God be with you.”—His whole soul
Full of the mighty enterprise ; to seal,
Fate as it is, or higher yet to reach
Above all former grandeur : upon that ground,
His gate of heaven, whence the beautiful
Humiliated Spirit of Contrition waved
Her roseate plumes, and with untiring wings
Bore up his prayers :—With odorous incense mixed
They, by the Angel of the Covenant
Offered, ascended, and acceptance gained.
Devoutly he murmurs.—“Dread ! O, dread Lord God !
Creator ! Redeemer ! Sanctifier ! with whom
Is life, is death ; my humblest thanks accept
For pardon, for grace, for peace ; by thee as gladly
Given, as by me cherished. Into thy parental bosom
All my fond hopes, all my trembling fears, I pour,
In thy protection trusting assuredly.
May I, oh may Wessex turn again to thee,
Never thy path to quit : On my poor country
Shower rich blessings ; once more raise her up,
Bid her be free, be great, be glorious,
Bid her be thine :—May I, myself devote
To noblest, to kingliest duties ; far shake off
Flattering parasites, and strong in thee,
In thy path go boldly on, come good, come ill.
May I myself forego, all joy forego,

In mine own luxury, even in my mental joys
When to my task adverse. As the labouring hind
Sows in glad hope, may I, a labouring king,
Sow in sure hope, that when my bleached bones
Dispersed shall be, and not a wind of heaven
Know of their resting; may the goodly seed
Flourish, bear increase; may it animate
Subjects their kings to love; may future kings
Guard their rich birthright, virtuous liberty,
And rule them so, that people, and that king
Shall themselves feel but one; so that nor license,
Nor griping tyranny, on either hand
Shall sever the holy chain. Greatest is he,
Who serves his country best: such greatness be
Mine; great indeed, great shall be my renown,
If, looking back through the long lapse of time
Kings shall arise, who, warned by my dread fall,
Shall rise as I rise; to my native land
True, ever true to thee.—My God be thou!
Their God be thou! of Wessex be thou God
As thou art Lord of all the capacious earth.
O thou, my Maker! to these hands give strength,
Strengthen these trembling knees, my loins gird up,
My whole frame nerve, be in my heart of heart;
Be heart, be soul, of this stern enterprise,
Bless us with victory, and, in victory,
Bless us with mercy, every foe subdued.”—
His whole soul cheered; in Heaven’s holy peace
Onward he speeds, and soon gains his woodland Strength
At Langport: reaching from Pedrida to the hill,

A barrier of trees and earth, and deep concealed
Stretches, built strongly; strongly, but yet more strong
In it's brave guardian, Alric of Summurtune.
Light, graceful, active, free, and generous;
His life all mirth, he of all mirth the life,
Guards the bright scenes around his native home,
And all it's hills, and all it's beauteous vales,
Pleasant, healthful, fertile, apt type of their chief.
Once had the Pagans felt his maiden sword
Name herself in their blood, felt their foul spoil
Unsafe his reach within, and fled, and gained
The main body of their march. Now, stronger knit,
Bold were the man, the two, the three, the four,
Who from his agile weapon did not shrink.
Wulf is his worshipped idol, Wulf he deems
All mortal men beyond; Wulf too loves him,
His brother in war's bond, his dearer friend
In the bland arts of peace. Well known that glance
Of daring deeds, Alric with kindling glance
Stands taller in his joy; the shoulder blades
Tighten even to touching, he has to retrieve
The honour of his town, and draws the breath
Of resolution to do so. Of Mocheaulre,
Alford, stout youth and tall, with pain curbs in
His courage, and with half their force remains
Chafing, yet not in wrath, for Alric leads
His resolute compeers.—Osred the swift,
Starts at his utmost speed; and Elwin strong,
From the beacon on Butleigh and his barrier
Across the gorge of the vale, and Eadwulf fierce

In advance of Summurtune, with gladdening shouts
Join the on-gathering. Osulf of Gefeltune,
His hundred friends, well armed in mail and heart ;
Eppa and Ida, of strong Camalate,
High-towering, distance-seeing, far renowned
For Arthur's home, Arthur's ever-flowing spring ;
Whence Sealwude long, and dense Gillingahamme,
The King's moor, the Pouldens, and rich Avalon's
Huge Tor and surrounding vale, the Mendip cliffs,
'The distant sea, river, and hill, and grove
Lie out-mapped distinctly, join the joyous host.
Osred, again at speed, over fertile plain,
O'er-leaping rivulet, stretching over hill,
Eadwin of Clevedune, Wada of Sceoptune, (on
The iron road,) Waltheof of Tidentune,
City of springs, near to that perennial stream
Gushing from the cavern where the tasteful witch-wife
Wove glittering fancies, in and athwart the blue
Rock, dark over-arching. Waltheof in charge
Of the further barrier, from Maesbyrig reaching
To Aac-dune high, holds honour's envied post
To the foe nearest : highly deserving he
Such exalted honour ; courage and conduct linked,
'Twin-brothers, nerve his heart. These Osred bids
Hold well their own, all other charge waste words,
With like speed he returns.—On, onward move
The bands well-connected. Harding of Dinescove,
Leofric of Peonna gladly greet them well,
And all, alert, (seldom so large a host
Wulf had to foray led,) eagerly foreseeing

Unusual vengeance and spoil, surround their chief ;
Who, with emotion strong, yet well restrained,
Weighing the cost of this first open act,
The changes and the chances of grim war,
It's summer triumphs, and it's wintry woes,
Throws his broad sword into the hopeful scale
Undaunted by danger ; self-reliant still,
For that in Heaven he trusts ; and calmly speaks :
“ Brethren, fast friends ; not by more boastful name
Ever to be entitled, save it should be,
Name dearly prized, Deliverers of Wessex,
All hail ! Heaven bless you ; bless our trusty swords ;
Save us in this our peril.—It were idle
To remind you that, from hence our Cenwalch drove
The stout-hearted, the iron-handed Britons back,
And chased them astonished to Pedridan-muthe ;
In hope to arouse that valour, which throbbing against
Restraint, bears hard as gaze-hounds on the leash,
When upon the edge of battle.—We are termed
Outlaws, thieves, vagabonds, have prices set
Upon each head, upon Wulf's the heaviest,
As if all were not Wulf. And what is Wulf ?
Your hearts, your ready hands, your swords, are Wulf ;
You the substantial, I the nominal.
Yes, you are Wulf, and I am but the mouth
By which Wulf speaks, in angry vengeance loud,
And deep, and strong, and fearless : to these fiends
Who, calling us outlaws, term themselves conquerors,
Kings, and benefactors ; kindly shearing us
In their beneficence, burning our forests down

In fondest love, flooding our fields with blood
In kind endearment, and—be thankful friends,
Hewing the father down, braining the wife,
Bearing off the virgin, and upon their blades,
Yes, upon their pike-blades, in mere harmless mirth
Tossing our children.—Need I remind you then
Of Aþric's hope, his lovely Summurtune
Plundered and burnt, yet again scarcely built?
Shall I detail the fate of Avalon?
Avalon, honoured isle, great Arthur's grave;
For he was great, and hated be the name
Of him, who in adulterous vengeance slew
The noblest foe of the Saxons. Shall I recall
The furious slaughter of her helpless monks?
The sacrilegious plunder of her wealth?
Or shall I point to Fraume, and tell you there
How Frau ran red with blood? Shall I incite you,
By recounting o'er and o'er, our daring deeds?
Deeds to which every bosom gives response,
Deeds which your very swords could prate of, were it
Worthy in warriors to be-praise themselves,
Not leave their deeds their doers to exalt.
Yet have those deeds our foul foe daunted so
That scarcely he ventures, East, West, North, or South
To move, but in full strength, each distant post
Cut off he knows not how.—It is our purpose,
And check me if unduly the phrase I use,
It is our purpose the Frau to march upon,
To join strength there with our father in renown,
To offer him our arms, our hands, our hearts.

Boldly have Ethelnoth and Merleswain, held
This dangerous fastness, often joined our bands,
Every man known, prized all your feats of arms ;
And, brave themselves, will admire bravery
And gladly our aid accept ; so, mutually
Supporting and supported, Ethelnoth's
And Wulf's bold warriors, straitly shall prove the mettle
Of Guthrun and his Pagan host abhorred :
And Wessex be up in arms ; or to revenge,
Or die with"—" Not die !—Wessex is up in arms" !
Shout the hot host, nor wait another word,
But clash their roaring shields, and dart their spears,
And wave their axes broad.—With instant march
Tramp they the forest dark : the forest dark
Re-echoes, and beneath each firm-set foot
Earth trembles.—Nor does less the affrighted earth
Shrink under Amund's tramp : the hungry host
Speed on from Cyppanhamme, through Abona's vale
And Pewishamme forest. Bromhamme falls beneath
Their iron vengeance, nor does Melcheshamme
Stay their devastating thirst. Slaughter and fire,
Impartial assessors. Nor is servile friend,
Nor self-devoting foe, in the red day
Of exterminating vengeance, safe or spared.—
Guthrun and Satan, and all the ferocious hosts
Of Earth or Hell, glory in their savagery,
As higher and higher still ascends the flame,
Reddening the sun, who veils her peerless brow
From the horrible vision. Tene from the fiery flood
Shrinks into her pebbly bed, and in Earth hides

Her pure, her silver urn. To Æscetun
Destroying rolls the deluge.—Through the charred, dry bark,
Spring, in her genial softness has evoked
The efforts of dying nature ; scarcely ten
Trees, spared by the flame when pursuing Alfred's flight,
Here with their pale green buds, as a hectic flush
Over the cheek of consumption, gloss the decay
Which has their substance gnawn. From stem to stem
Blackened trunks stretch, with boughs close intertwined;
And, stayed by the massive, the miserable wreck
Of homes once blest, form a monumental pile
Over-burthened with sad memories.—Desperate men,
And stern, and high resolved, here the host stay ;
Their assault abiding.—Hachwy, in sere age
Hale yet, yet vigorous, and his sons, strong knut,
Rendered by oppression stronger ; now dare defy
The wolves in their ravening.—Daunted by their cool
Bearing, and resolute ; Amund hesitates,
Though to hesitate unwont. Ferocious his march
Never yet had known check. Profusely shed,
Red, the rich life-blood streamed his path around.
As tigers revel in gore and slaughter on,
Wanton in the lust of blood, yet scared, slink off
From a resisting cur ; so pauses Amund
Questioning and wondering. Nor wonders long.
Clear is the voice, and steady is the speaking
Of Hachwy the oppressed : “ Hear me, Sir King !
Since king yourself you call. My true king slain,
For he is slain or ye had not stood here,
Against ye I no more strove, but sat me down

Hopeful of peace. I bade my boys be peaceful,
Although their Saxon blood chafed rebelliously.
Peaceful we have been ; what has been my reward ?
Ye indeed spared my home, but every beast,
All my poor flock, all my scant winter store,
Ye devoured, ye slaughtered, ye maimed ; destroying the use
Of that which ye could not use : yet was I quiet,
Ye were my kings : I had no other king
Or Hachwy had not submitted. Yet not enough
Had I endured. Robbers, outlaws, emboldened
By my king's death, as summer flies swarmed thickly,
What ye spared Wulf has stolen, though he took not
But to supply his need ; Ye—O, that pitying Heaven
Had not slept upon it's wrath ! Yet but seven nights,
Even in the dead of night, when deep sleep soothed
All sorrow, every suffering, ye, ye hewed down
My miserable door, door that never kept
A beggar from my board ; bound us in sleep
And even before our eyes—O, God of Heaven !
Save me from madness.—my children in their shame
Dare not look up to the sweet light of heaven.—
Now, hear me King !—all weakness is thrown off,
Submission, servitude ; your grave or mine,
Yawns wide, yawns hungrily ; now try your strength.”
So rapidly, so strongly, the cloth-yard shaft
Flies, that the Sea king shrieks. It harms him not,
But the heart's-blood of Hemming of Langöeland
Spouts from two issues : Sharply, unerringly
The iron hail beats down : strong Brimilskior,
Furious Helsing, Klofi of Hadeböe,

Amleth of Saltholm, Frenar and Ossur of Kiel
Instantly die, and twenty more fall struggling
'Ere the Pirate-King draws breath : then furiously
He strikes, he storms, he raves. His lance sings on
Bloodless, and lost. Hrolf of Helsingaborg
Collected in his might, with certain eye
At Cutha aims : the swifter arrow speeds
Through the fore-arm and nails it to the shaft ;
And as he swerves, another through his throat
Lets loose the gurgling blood. Halti the bold,
The daring king of Oesel, lured by thirst
Of plunder, not by revenge, Kera of Odensholm,
Karkar the cruel, and Dixin of Runöe,
Thier shields interlock, and with uplifted lances
Press towards the barrier : Hachwy's ready bolt
The centre man selects ; stricken he leaps
High in the air, and falls. Active Beorht's axe
Cleaves Karkar to the brows ; clinging he clasps
Hard on the helve. The vindictive blade of Amund
Maims Beorht's shoulder, and athwart the fence
Falling he sways. As hunger-goaded wolves
Fight over a slaughtered lamb, so over his child
Fights Hachwy, and, impatient for revenge,
Fights Amund. His blue sword, high-sweeping, falls
Upon Hachwy's leathern helm, thence glancing down
Grazes the shoulder : yet no triumphant shout
Rises, the opposing axe has cloven through
The Red Shield, and had not Eiric, the King siezed
And backward drawn him, deep had been the share
Down his left side : back drawn, the trenchant blade

The boiling blood barely tastes.—Thick, thick the blows
On either hand fall sharp ; hurtling they fall
Yet harmless fall, thwarting or aim or strength ;
When Berthfrid, in his mighty might, upheaves
A huge mass, ponderous, a giant's load ;
Such as Hrimthussi wont to hurl in the war
Of ocean-rocks. High whirls the smoking bulk,
Pauses, then thundering falls, wide scattering
Destruction, pale dismay. Six men of name
Writhing lie, or dead ; and splitting as it strikes,
Flying the fragments wound.—Palsied the host
Gaze upon each other :—Manly Beorht's corse
Remains, the life has fled. With pious care,
Tenderly they place it on the grass, as though
It felt comfort from the verdure. No tears flow
Revenge all tears has stanch'd ; and to the strife
Again they their strength devote. Again the shafts
Fly thick, fly fast : far away the host recede,
The battle pauses for breath. With practised skill
Five chosen bands their tortoise-fence tight lock,
Their quivering lances shake, their axes whirl.
Four the defenders taunt ; forward far stretching,
The axe-men, the others vigorously shield,
And fast and hot they ring. The splinters fly,
Yet bite not deep into the hardened stems
Those axes heavy and keen. Down rattling
Pours a stone-storm, furiously dinting helm and mail,
But as of charmed lives, stones, lances, barbs,
Harm not the Christians.—Amund, with ready thought
Bids the strongest arms the straightest stem select

Hew off the boughs, and in connected belts
Sling it, and sway it. Answering his song,
Song went to guide the mariner, cheerily
Timing all efforts the anchor huge to weigh,
Up the firm beach the ponderous keel to haul,
Or across the sandy tongue to make escape
And launch into another ocean. Gallantly
It sways, strength collecting ; directed endwise on
Battering the rampart. Firmly immoveable,
Scorning the feeble toy, the rampart smiles.
Blow upon blow succeeds ; it cleaves, it moans,
Crevices gape, logs shift, stones rolling fall ;
Heaving with breathing life, as a monster huge
Of the ocean, stranded : crashing, loud-lumbering,
Bound the oaks of a hundred winters : roaring on,
Living the torrents storm the wondrous breach,
And under a thousand wounds his youngsters fall.
Hachwy, as a bull by evening wolves beset
Tramples one, gores another, ready still
For every assailant, until tired out
They sit around and gasp : step by step recedes,
At every step, some threatener striking down,
And gains his frail cottage door : there, stands at bay ;
Around him a fence of dead men. Shamed, enraged,
Storm they, they rage, they threat. Stones, blazing brands
Thick fall, yet he stands firm. Securely closing
The gap for a moment ; unhelmed and unarmed
He advances, he calmly speaks. “ Enter here King,
Your accursed work behold ” ; overawed, Amund,
Follows as a bidden child : “ the knife has saved

These from your lust, there my aged mother waits,
I could not raise my hand against my mother,
Your vengeance, damned fiend" !—In blood matured,
Joying in blood, blood-thirsty, and blood-seeking,
Hangs back, in shame, the King : not so his host :
Stone upon stone still hurling, brand after brand,
Body upon body, above foes friends high piled
Rises to War a dreadful hecatomb ;
So dreadful, that the very demons flee
Horried, disgusted.—Yet is it glorious war,
Word glossing over many a devil's deed :
And, on the galled Pagans rush more vigorously,
Singing in triumph to the clash of shields.—

More eyes than Guthrun's see the ascending flame,
More ears than Guthrun's hear the afflicting shout.—

Way-worn and weary, yet upheld by all
A woman's constancy, a woman's love,
A woman's truth, and trust, and confidence,
And soul-devoting faith ; Ethelswitha
And her two children, Æthelflœd spirited,
Eadwerd the sturdy, slowly journey on :
Nor can their speed increase ; their only guide
Bran the strong sleuth-hound. Grave to austerity,
Cautious of deceit, with practised scent acute
He carefully traces, accurately distinguishes
His noble master's foot, from among all feet
Which had ever that track crossed.—Through plashy pool,
Through mire, o'er moor, o'er waste, through forest thick
Encumbered by ashes thick, thick moss, tall fern,
Gaily smiling amid the desolation drear

And covering up man's crimes ; now sober-pacing
Now conning every fume ; tracing, re-tracing,
Every maze unthreading, plodding silently,
Now whimpering gladly, breathing intelligence,
Enhancing confidence, not suffering aught
From his task to divert him, carefully forward treads
The skilful hound, proud in honourable trust ;
And now increases in speed ; the fresher trail
More perfect, since they the wide-burnt vale o'erpassed
Where Biss from Stanheng plain her pure stream rolls,
On toward Abona :—Nor with the hastening
Less pleased the Ealdorman, her brother bold,
And large, and strong, fit son of a fit sire
Ethelred large, and of Eadburh of the blood
Of Mercian royalty. Leofric, whose strength
Few men could equal, whose valour none excel ;
Lucumon stalwort, bony Ethelfrith,
With twenty thegns, all true, all well-armed men,
Proof against thrice their number, but ill fit
In open field such ferocious horde to meet
As from the steep ground are swiftly sweeping down
At full stretch for the prey.—On her right hand,
In the post of honour, threatening the foe
Athulf and his compeers ; and in the rear,
And on the left the thegns ; thegns, yet each one
A leader trained, ten thousand thegns to head.
Milk white the palfrey, in his rider proud
Paces upon Bran's foot-print, and behind,
A battle-steed laden with soiled arms,
And torn habiliments, by faithful grooms

Curbed in and led, close follows. Amund calls
His horsemen around him : fleetly mounted all
And eager for fight, their swords as yet unfleshed,
Thirsting for daily food. "There see, my friends,
A gallant quarry ; some dame of noble rank
By her high bearing, and her steady eye
Defying, not inviting. That prize shall be
The partner of my high-seat, her coy pride
Will soon melt in the merry wassail bowl,
And laugh over her dead-man bridegroom. Ring and Solvi,
Olaf and Bano, Eiric and Biarco,
Rolf, Svart, and Hareld ; Haarfager has trained
Ye in hard schools. Ye know the value of fire,
Against blue steel, and Lapland war-proof cloaks ;
Now try it against willow : fire the wood,
And stretch your men out well ; giants, or dwarfs,
Heroes, or Christian devils, the wasps shall swelter
Thick in their nest. Strong Thorold, Biorn, Haco,
Kobbold, and Wic, and Keld, and Thorer bold ;
We, as war-brethren who have mingled blood,
And exchanged arms, fight side by side to day ;
Nor shall stout Haldor of Raumsdall, who pants hard
To prove his Norseman mettle, here lack chance
Or of wounds, or of honour.—Wait we yet awhile
Until the hungry giant lays fast hold.—
Now brothers to your sport."—The unctuous brands
Of bickering pitch-pine, blazing, wave on high,
And in the curving boughs, and budding twigs
Hang, or around the doated, wrinkled stems,
That rear their writhed arms up to the blue heaven,

Piled close, tight bound, bite, gnaw, and flame, and smoke.
Hurry on the demons,—each as a raven dark
Croaking and ominous, the witch-wife's horse
Who wades breast deep in blood, and richly feasts
On warrior's glassy eyes. Wide-sailing ernes,
And gleads, and filthy repulsive carrion birds,
Scream for the feast of swords. Gloating their eyes,
Assured and rejoicing, dashing on amain
Gallop Amund and his host, the affrighted plain
Vanishing beneath them. Practised in their art
Stout Athulf shielding his sister, every knee
Firm-planted, spears oblique, and shields tight locked,
Steadily the men of Wessex unflinching wait
The impetuous charge.—The living lightnings stream
From their far-blazing eyes: reining hard their steeds
The Pagans wheel; they charge, they wheel again;
And charge with lances quivering eagerly
For their allotted blood. No missile flies
From Athulf, his longing lust curbs Amund in
Lest his fair prize be harmed.—With prayerful hands
And eyes upraised, and to her bosom clasping
The children of her love, Ethelswitha
Calm, and collected, bows to Heaven's will.—
So pass the hours, the Wessex men confident,
The Pagans fretted, jaded, agonized with rage.—
Far on the right, smoke and atrocious flame,
Involve the Northland chiefs; demons disport
Themselves in the reeking cloud: and Odin storms,
And Hilda shrieks, and the hurrah battle-cry
Rings in the furious blast, careering on

The fading flame to feed : the fading flame
Lights up afresh, and fades ; sinks, blazes up
As a furnace seven times heated by fierce blasts ;
Yet withers not bud, nor leaf, nor slenderest twig ;
Nor driest touchwood blain smoulders or burns.
Raging the demons howl ; raging their hosts,
Fiend-souled, wolf-hearted, ply the murderous task
With murderous energy. The flames rebound
Scorching and blasting their feeders ; axes sharp
Ring on the stems ; unharmed, the hardened stems
Hurl blade from helve, and ring-mail cloven and stained,
And helmets split, and shields in the iron shower
Groan, clash, and ring, and rive. Duke Ethelnoth
Warily watching, aloud suddenly
Shouts “ Merleswain cut sharp ” ; a hundred gleaming blades
A hundred cords sever ; swaying, a hundred trees
Down thundering crash : yells, shrieks, sharp wailing cries,
Rise amid blearing smoke ; distant echo wails,
And shrieks, and yells ; yells, shrieks, and wails again.
Along the resounding hills, wails, shrieks, and yells
Course over the blackened vale.—Sternly Guthrun hears
That thunder crash explode, disjoined flame sees
Across the sky flashing.—Beaten down, maimed, crushed,
Out from the fallen forest writhing twine
Groaning the Norsemen, all armour of defence
Into the wearers dinted. Nor yet long
Lie they tormented ; Saxon bill-hooks broad
Loose let their howling souls. Far far away
Scared flee the demons. O’er the protected wood
Abdiel and his leigon, armed yet forbearing, hover

As Raphaël's mild breath wafts away the flame,
Quenches the vindictive brands.—So as the careering,
Strong rush of elemental war, oft lulls ;
Leaves a torn vessel to recruit her strength,
To right, cut away the wreck, then, 'ere the worn
Life-despairing mariner is dry, whirls down
Hurling the play-thing hulk sheer o'er the waste,
And into fragments crushes her ; the strife
Lulls for a moment. Ethelnoth, Merleswain,
Eardulf and Sidulf, Cenred, Alfwold, Elf,
Dash forward on Amund's host ; nor Amund's host
Winces from the struggle : Godfrid, Gormo tall,
Both born in Langöeland, sons of one sire,
Bœmund their elder brother left to fill
The throne, when Bœldeg old and frail shall take
Odin or Hela's path ; for, maimed and worn,
Wearily the king his numbered days counts out,
And calls on loitering death ; oft uncalled coming,
Oft to entreaty deaf. On the blue wave
The brother vi-kings fought, reddened their blades
In Vendland's, Estland's, Suithiod's, Gautland's blood ;
So it was blood, unheeding of what race ;
Then joined the cry of vengeance ; pouncing down
As upon carrion hungry birds obscene,
So foul these warriors, only to be known
From wolves by their human form. Cenred first feels
Their iron maces ; both at once strike full
Upon either shoulder ; low the youthful chief
Sinks, shaken throughout. Indignant Ethelnoth
Leaps across the fallen ; true, his trenchant blade

Cleaves Godfrid's wrist, spouting the black blood springs
Staining his dark-red shield, fit heraldry
For him who in blood swims ; then, whirling round
Gashes through Gormo's neck, and thick and fast
Spears thrust, and axes flash, and brown swords sway,
The tide of direst slaughter. Still, still fiercely
The Pagan host holds on, the iron mass
Moveless as an earthen mound. Eager Amund sees,
Cheers his stout warriors : again his horsemen charge
At their utmost strength and speed ; nor slack they now
Their spears to launch, loud-whistling on they whirl,
Not harmless all. Kalf of Ey-gautland, famed
For steady aim and strong, through the tough buckler
Drives his Rune-charmed point, goring the side
Of Leofric, Earl of Wiltunscire, and cries
“ So dogs of Wessex ! shall the wild wolves tear,
And up your heart's blood lap. Cur dogs are ye
To slink, to hide, nor dare in open line
Stand up as men ; but kneel, and crouch, and bend,
Like a broken bulrush ; taste again my strength,”
His second spear swift flies ; the darting snake
Hisses, and had drawn blood, but Raphaël
Wafted [†]is harmless, and Ealhswitha
Towards heaven looks and prays. The Saxon blood
Grows hot grows furious ; yet prudent Athulf checks
Warily their valour, and indignantly
Amund reproaches. “ Is it thus that men,
In bright arms sheathed, their manhood can forget
And woman's bright blood seek ? shameful disgrace
Shall alight upon you, false hearted recreant.”

Whirling in anger his lance ; the muscle broad
Of the strong loin the burning point receives,
Checked by the swift-urged shield, or the entrails thick
Had reeked upon the shaft. Heightened in rage
They wheel, again they charge, not again safe ;
Plunge the tough spears through the broad-breasted steeds,
They reel, they rear, or standing, fount out blood,
Tremble, and shrieking break their mighty hearts.
Unhorsed, many warriors, now with mace, or sword,
Or double axe, hew the devoted band ;
Shaken, not broken. Suddenly the foe
Sling back their shields, and flee. Wary Athulf warns
Entreats, commands in vain,—“ They flee ! they flee !
Now forward Wessex ” ! each exulting tongue
Shouts, they dash forward. Fatal, the rash pursuit
Breaking all bond, destroys their resisting power ;
Suddenly rally the Pagans. Each knight holds
Three men at bay ; and as the horsemen wheel
Still faces danger. Amund, remounted, pounces
Again upon the quarry ; Kalf and Thorer
Close upon his flanks the rapid rush support.
Plunging the led-horse drags his struggling grooms,
And breaks, and scours away. Confused and strained
They, limping their post regain, weak yet enduring,
Suffering yet unsubdued.—For revenge burning,
Waves high stern Kalf his crashing spiky mace,
Heavily it falls ; Athulf with ready arm
Receives it, repels it, with superhuman strength,
Given by the Archangel in the imminent peril,
Heaves up the warrior from his steed staggering,

And throws him as a quoit, placed by the wrist
Of an adept player : Thorer surprised, reins back
His well trained charger, upon the grooms strikes hard
With his broad axe :—not warriors, but oft used
To agile hunting feats, bend they aside :
Harmless the blow falls ; grasping each a rein,
Their short bright blades through in an instant pierce
His fleshy thighs and pin them to his beast.
Maddened with anguish, borne o'er the reeking plain
Fall at once man and horse, one mound of gore
Black and revolting.—Amund, with iron grasp
Gripes Ethelswitha ;—a more iron grasp
Clenches his sword arm ; upon his brawny thigh
Bran fastens : one soft word yet powerful
To do more forbids : a voice yet more powerful
Through the Pirate rings terrifically, “ Wulf ! Wulf ” !
The wide field echoes “ Wulf ” ! Sealwude shouts “ Wulf ” !
The broad sky answers “ Wulf ” ! and, panic stricken,
The whole battle pauses.—“ Amund, we have met.
Wulf of surprise advantage scorns to take.
Clear a listed field ” !—Had forked lightning fallen,
And a yawning grave ploughed out beneath his feet,
The Pirate had never blenched : at that stern voice
Confounded he stands, he shrinks.—No giant bulk,
No huge overpowering monster, dark as night,
And as invulnerable, braves the chief
Of many hundred fights ; but, of spare frame,
Of middle stature, of face dark-matted o'er
With unshorn locks and beard, lithe, sinewy,
Gracefully backing a war-steed, bony, strong,

Ungroomed, toil-worn, which, or his wondering eyes
All his senses cheat, but even now fled away ;
No glittering helm girding his manly brow,
Not even a mailed shirt protecting him,
But a rude leathern tunic. And this is Wulf ?
The active, the unshrinking, never seen,
Every where marauding. He, he a King
By such a peasant to be bearded ! Indignation
Astonishment replaces, to his height rising,
Direct the blow falls ponderous ; active the foot,
Thoroughly trained the steed, both man and horse
Swerve from the weapon, and the rapidly
Sure-striking mace the yielding helm dints in ;
Stung with the piercing pain, impelled by rage
Amund throws off his helm ; the spouting gore
Matting his tangled locks. So fierce, so fell,
His threatening glare, warriors of longest life
Shudder, and far retreat. Rising again,
Hopes he the peasant to crush. Swift though his arm
In vengeance descends, swifter his adversary
Waits not, the furious weapon he intercepts
With shield obliquely held ; off turned the blade
Wounds his own steed ; plunging, he rears on high ;
Wulf's agile heel again his charger guides,
And, steady of eye and hand, with certain aim
Severing the muscles, adroitly down he drives
Into the arm-pit his true-tempered blade,
But loses hold : Sheathed in the griesly wound
Weapon with spirit contends, the gloomy soul
Struggling to wind out it's way. With the left arm

Strong in his death throe, the loud-cursing king
Hurls his huge shield, so furious his energy
Wulf in the saddle reels, but only reels ;
The impetuous blow the guardian spirit stayed
Or he had sunk ; far away, far it flies
Striking Einar on the forehead ; ready friends
To the rear bear him, and cool his dizzied brain
In Frau's pure stream : perturbed now and dark
She rolls along her many-tinged waves,
And the beauteous valley, bending to the stream,
(Her flattering mirror,) shrinks through all her woods.
War-brethren true, to blood-made compact firm,
Despite of the honourable pledge which guards
As with oaths a listed field, reeking with haste
Gallop Kobbold, Anlac, Biorn, Haco, Wic and Keld,
Nor does Haldor tighten his rein, though not of them.
One piteous cry ascends, the Saxons dread
So fierce a thunderbolt their chief must crush ;
Wulf's keener eye measures the hurrying haste,
Reins back his steed, and, along the tempest pours,
He scathless, they wondering : not to wonder long :
Alric has now his day of reckoning.
Stabbed in the chest, down rolls the panting horse,
And plunging, Haldor's mailed breast beats in ;
Nor Biorn and Haco escape, o'er Eppa and Ida
Glory her beam has waved. Twin brothers they,
Biorn and Haco twins, from Gautland high
Whence Ragnar his bride gained, by vile Orm held
Within rocks dragon-guarded : a rattling hail of blows
Pour in the Gautland men ; strong to endure

The Saxons all blows take, nor strike again,
Until in very weariness the storm
Wears out itself; then, in an instant each
Strikes hard, strikes home. Through Biorn's bursten heart
Passes Ida's blade, mailed shirt but ill defence
Against the strong Saxon arm: through the one-eyed
Abased visor, Eppa's point well aimed
Crashes between Haco's eyes, and drinks the brain
Hot steaming. From the equal contest wheeling
Kobbold, and Wic, and Keld, in arms renowned,
For mutual faith renowned; whose barbs swift-winged
Fell as fiery furies, or on Eysyssel's shores
Valland, or Frankland; and who nobly shared
Wealth, honour, on equal terms, now to divide
Disgrace in impartial brotherhood: condensed
As one destructive cloud, on, on they sweep
Toward Wulf, as yet without sword; again he wheels,
Again they pass him, Alric leaping in
As a young hart, from Amund's yet bleeding side
Plucks the red brand; Wulf waves the gory blade:
Mad for the Bornholm blood beneath the helm
Into Thorold's neck she bites; Alric's eager knife
Houghs Keld's heavy steed, yet weeps as the poor beast,
Taught by his reasoning master to delight
In war's foul havoc limps, and rolling tears
Gush from his blood-shot eyes. In courtesy
The high-minded Saxon smites not until his foe
Huge, strong, and stern, upon equal ground has set
His iron feet. Cased close in complete mail
A stalwart man-at-arms, scorns he the small

Unmailed stripling: "Now, by Odin's head!
Scorn were it, wriggling reptile, in the dust
To crush thee: hide thee in thy grandame's lap,
Or I so scourge thee, that thy whimpering
Shall scare thy play-fellows." The ready smile
Plays upon Alric's lip; still courteously
Greets he the stranger-knight: "True I am young
And scanty schooled, yet not to learn unapt,
Lessoned by worthy teacher; it may be
The scholar may o'er leap the teacher."—"Thus then I teach
A measure to rugged music,"—in fierce rage
Indignant the giant roars, the quiet mirth
In his dark soul rankling:—Falls the ponderous
Mace, as a polled oak by lightning riven;
So heavy the crushing blow, the vast bulk bends
With his furious energy, o'erswaying far
The wary opponent. Sharp, the active blade
Through his groin rips. Howling in agony,
In seven-fold anger wide around he strikes,
As with a threshing flail: at every whirl
Deeper and deeper stabs his lithe adversary;
Sinking to his knees, his left side covering
With the bull-hide, wildly striking as he kneels,
Deep curses muttering, muttering bitterly,
Groaning he falls, and swears, and gives up life.
So stretched out huge, upon the Icy-sea
By Lapland boatmen wounded, floats a whale
Spouting hot blood for water.—Duly breathed
Rests Wulf: the foe rest not; they at the mighty bulk
Of fallen Amund glance, then upon Wulf

Cast their devouring eyes ; and but for shame,
And for their oath of blood, fain would they sling
Back their protecting shields. Soul-questioning
Long time they pause, Wulf abiding their assault.
Keld falling, the hot blood in vindictive rage
Reddens his compatriots forehead ; avengingly
Flies the loud-whistling spear : whistling it flies
But to quiver in the earth. Alric besets
The twin-giant of Alsen : Wulf with ready hand
Smites hard upon Anlac.—Blow for blow fall thick,
And fast, and furious.—Skilful each eye and hand
To give or to ward the assault, Anlac's sword breaks,
He clasps Wulf's neck ; striking his strong-boned steed,
Wulf, forward darting, from his saddle draws
Astounded the Northman ; through the midriff plunges
His blade swift-descending, hurling off the corpse,
With equal hand the Alsen man he stabs,
Now to him left by Alric.—Furiously
Around the strife rages ; Harding and Leofric,
Osulf and Alford, Osred the swift of foot
And in fight dexterous, noble Ethelnoth
Merleswain and Ethelfrith, as lions strong,
And fresh, and vigorous ; with each their host
Equally vigorous, and fresh, and strong,
Though by fame their deeds unchronicled, sweep the field,
A hurricane of deaths. Nor one foul foe
Lives to reveal his fate. Alsen and Langöeland,
With their thrice-beauteous meads, and lakes, and streams,
Nor Bornholm's coast iron-girdl'd and dangerous,
Nor Gautland thronged with wealthiest merchandise,

Nor Odinsholm, nor Runöë, nor their king's
Own Samsöe the beloved, the prized, the famed
For his fame, shall with hurrah-chorus hail
Their plunder-laden barks. Deep be your wail,
And bitter, and prolonged ; their golden prows
Never your eyes shall greet. Mourn, widows mourn,
Mourn maidens, and lament ! their hearts beat not,
Their eyes see not, their minstrel tongues no more
Shall sing your beauty, pledge your throbbing love.

O'er the wide field of strife, now calm, now hushed ;
Mute with astonishment, dreading their success,
So sudden, so unexpected, amidst the awful
Scene, in few words but fervent, they offer up
Praises heartfelt, to Him who all o'er-rules,
Influencing man's evil to work out His good ;
His mercy as wondrous as inscrutable.
Earl Merleswain, Duke Ethelnoth, and valiant Wulf,
They his rank well knowing, from all else concealed,
With Athulf the Ealdorman close consult hold
And decision issue. Ready hands at once
The weltering dead collect with decent care,
Reverencing the sacred aspect of mere death,
More reverent of those who such death died ;
They strip off the mail, take the weapons, but touch not
Wealth, or aught else. In the capacious marsh,
Whence Biss flows Northward, deep they bury them ;
The surface recompose, into the forest
The fallen stems remove. The adjacent trees
Extend their boughs, now unpent ;—Wide, wide around
Trooping, dense clouds arrive hastening ; down they pour

Deluge upon deluge.—Hurrying with swift flood,
Biss into Abona sweeps the loathsome load
Staining Sabrina's wide wave. Brilliantly
Sunna with pregnant blaze, fertility
Calls from exuberant earth: rich verdure, fresh,
Unstained, and lovely, at the Archangel's touch
Quickly overgrowing, every trace conceals
Of the direful contest.—From a terrible dream
We awake and all is peace.—A vessel proud
Filled by an in-pouring wave, founders at once
Yet smooth the waters still glance merrily.—
High thoughts and fond, resolute Eahlswitha
Restraining, awaits: Her lord the homely garb
Concealed not. The Queen held her stately dignity,
The wife, the mother trembled, and for aid
Over her babes prayed fervently.—Repressing
Joy from the common gaze, following Wulf
Her palfrey turns: averted either face
He at her stirrup walks; few words and low
Pass,—turning,—eloquent in her majesty,
Glistening her eye proudly glancing o'er the host,
Calmly and steadily proclaiming him,
“God save King Alfred”! she, her fond heart bursting,
Falls weeping upon his neck.—Sacred the joys,
Sacred the sorrows of exalted rank:
The whole host stand confounded in the excess
Of astonished pleasure.—One broad shout ascends
Rending the clear sky, wide the convulsed cheer
Careers over ocean, booming as thunder roars,
And spreading to each headland, bay, and shore,

The wilderness of waters breaks, and foams, .
Redoubling it's wild song : so the broad shout
Breaks on the distant hills, and woods, and plains,
And every echo to every echo shouts
“ God save him !—God save King Alfred ” !

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE NINTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E N I N T H .

Alfred fortifies Æthelingöe. Ethelswitha describes her journey in search of him. He relieves a wandering beggar. Odin seeks to an oracle for counsel.

Night, over half the globe her robe has spread,
Star spangled oft ; whence to this lower earth
Celestial intelligences look in love,
And interchange sweet influence ; now consigned
As to that Abyss of Darkness whence, evoked
By the Primal Architect, this goodly frame,
This planetary system, uprose sublime
In virgin beauty, and the songs of Heaven
Greeted the uprising ; certain thence to derive
Increase of pleasure, and wonder, and themes for praise.—

In his unseen, unheard, soft soothing car,
Dainer, ever dizzily drooping, dreamily
Waves his thorny rod of power, pillowing
Pain, and disease, and care ; bidding all life
Gratefully itself renew, as in the abyss
Beneath the ocean world, where dark dwarfs hold
Their unsubstantial reign. For toil recruited
Skeenfaxi with distended mane, and tail
Far streaming, scatters the cool, zephyred dew ;
And Sunna, in o'erpowering glory shrined,
Lashes her raging steeds, and pours along
The glories of her lord, sweet-smiling Day.—

At Abyrig close conferring, ominously
Watching each other's look, the fiends who fled
The sudden disclosure of the angelic host,
Heard that concussive shout ; booming it travelled
As the roar of a far off hurricane, through them
It rang, convulsively rang, convulsing them
With horrible apprehension ; as a passing-bell
In time of pestilence, strikes with shuddering
A guilty land, every soul questioning,
“ Who shall fall next ” ? In the murk darkness closely,
Cautiously concealing all illusive pomp,
Even as erst in Egypt they were fain
To ensconce themselves in bulbs, or reptiles vile,
When giants threatening, thundered at their heels.
Or, as Loke slinking from vindictive Thor,
When the salmon's tail became thin beneath his grasp ;
Deep away cast, and buried, lest the eye
Of an avenging angel should detect

Their secret lurk, in muttering sounds and low,
As a paddock's evening murmur gurgling
O'er some flicker-lighted marsh, they in fear consult ;
Scarcely less dreading lest the stealthy ear
Of their tyrannic chieftain, should be close
To every tremulous lip. So undefined
The mystery-shrouded threat that shakes them all,
So shiveringly tormenting the suspense,
Whatever the danger, Heimdaller with Vidar must
Seek the affrighting cause. In imminent
Dread, yet with braggart confidence, the vote
Obey they submissive ; they are on this side worst,
Even worst were better than heart-sick suspense.
Each on his spectral steed of dissolving cloud,
Gulltoppr and Lettfeter ; glide they smoothly,
Led by well-tutored ears, instinctively
To the birth-bed of all sound, and stealingly,
On breezes that scarcely could waft a thistle down,
Over Pewishamme forest, through the cindery vale,
Across Stanheng to Sealwud, over unfolding buds,
Vidar, in shoes of silence, softly skims ;
Then sinks to the vale, and over tangled grass,
Over sighing bulrush, o'er the shivering crest
Of slumbering aspen-grass, undisturbingly
Floats :—and Heimdaller, with ears sensitive
To the meeting point of silence and of sound ;
Whence the one starts living, wherein the other dies,
Hears the leaves gaily singing as they rise
From each stem ascending : On the distant hills
Hears the fleece increase, upon each of a wandering flock

But intelligence derives not. Stalking, involved
In thrice-woven darkness, elusively concealed,
Satan the search pursues: all close, all still,
Such power have spirits blest beyond spirits malign,
In despair he surceases. Downcast, homeward flit
As obscene birds startling the ear of night,
They, by themselves; and, incomposedly
In aspect and bearing, of disappointment speak
Ere lip has moved. Deepening, the mystery
Deepens their abject terror, and their shame.—

Throughout the Pagan horde, licentiousness
With midnight riot reels. Mad, wanton waste
Spills over the ale, the mead, he cannot gulp;
Burns the food he sickens at in his gluttony.
The roar of comrades ringing through drowsy heads,
Shouting they sleep, soundly sleeping still they shout,
Exulting they curse, cursing they still exult,
Out-demoning demons.—In the Christian camp
Deliverance prompts their prayers, their hymns attunes,
And meek devotion, from the heart's inmost shrine,
Mingles gushing tears with praises. Camalate
Rises still nearer to heaven, and every vale
Is a high place of the field. Strict watchfulness
Listens at every strengthened point; the hills
Glitter with outlooking eyes; the beacon fires
Wait ready to out-blaze. Wædmor contains
Her own liege lord, and, richer than all wealth,
Holds Ethelswitha, courageous Æthelflœd
And infant Eadwerd, training for future fame
At his mother's breast. Strictly the household troop

Mounted in outpost, watch their holy charge,
All the hope of Wessex, save her trust in Heaven.

Morning awakening, over the dewy lawn
Trips, spangling harebells with her crisped pearls.
Alauda, and high-stretching Chanticleer
Call up the hinds to labour, summon chiefs
To honour's glorious toil. Wholesome yet spare,
No temptation to excess, the welcome meal
Thanked for, and thankfully eaten, they discuss
The present, the engrossing danger. Eahlswitha
As the King's wife, not as the Queen of Wessex,
(No King's wife acknowledged as queen, since Eadburga
With disgrace stained the queenly rank) listens not speaks.
"Since that so sore a defeat has overthrown,
In God's all righteous mercy to his children,
The Sea-king and his host; no longer hope,
Should I say hope when we have nought to fear
Seeing the hand of Heaven so manifest
In this glorious victory? still we must expect
Our haunts will be now well known, and that 'ere long
All the exterminating hordes, infuriate,
As galled, as goaded wolves, gathering strength
Will at once rush down upon Sealwude. I can hold
All it's whole length and breadth against the world,
With our true yeomen on their native soil,
Save against fire. Heaven has preserved us once
From that unsparing foe, yet that Providence
May not again be vouchsafed. Bethink we then
How best to secure the plain: deadlier war
Than we have ever brooked, in his red eye

Comprehending our utmost strength, bids his foul maw
Fouly rejoice : considerately I advise
As in my own land experienced, I should hold,
(For I shrink not from the trial but rather seek
Renown upon her own threshold) Sealwude
And all it's marches, from Peonna onward
To the broad ford ; manning the swelling hills
Whence Stour pours forth her beauties, and the banks
Of winding Frau, twin river to twin town,
Northward to Farlea, or on to Abona,
In detachments well selected ; so as if driven in
To fall back upon the Mendip chain, Smaldune
Kyning-setl, and Camalate, aye, to Gillingahamme.
A long but a safe line, or I reckon but
Ill upon our men of Summursete. Even these lost,
The marsh between the Mendip and the Tor
Of Avalon, and the Pouldens, still can be held
Such is my counsel. Long have we retained
All, as daring outlaws, now, by the King's name
Increased, our strength counts thousandfold." So Ethelnoth
Ceases wise counsel, and Earl Merleswain speaks :
"I would but add to such matured advice,
To such safe conduct as, under Heaven has been
Tried so successfully ; and under which
Much have we dared, and advantageously,
Or in repulse, or in cheering victory ;
From each assay growing more vigorous,
In confidence more assured : yet one word more.—
Our ears were deaf, our senses most obtuse,
Did we not heed that, of these plundering kings

These destroying demons, one, even now despoils
Tramples upon, burns, ravages Demetia.
Unsufficed by all plunder, ever hungry they,
When gold, and food, and plunder, there shall cease,
As they must cease, Sabrina's flood will cross
And herry our Western coast. Steyning can relate
The fury of the fight, when Eahlstan drove
The pirates into the sea.—At Pedridan-muthe
On either hand, and Northward to Cleve Dune,
Save Worte-byrig and the Saint's head, scarcely a mile
But has good beaching-ground: form we there posts,
Man we the ancient camps and beacons high,
Quantock and Brentknoll, Cossen-tune, Rowbyrig,
Wortebyrig, and Cadbyrig.—So oft has our brave king
Conquered, and but that his generous nature spared
The untameable rovers, bound nor to sea nor land
By tie divine or human, bound by no pledge,
Their very gods their exemplars; Wessex had been
Yet in safe keeping.”—Arises Athulf next;
“It would but ill become me, noble chiefs
To speak, when in speaking I myself may check
By counsel unmatured, and as a child
Sit down grieving and ashamed. I then will speak
Only as a brother; not with wisdom's tongue,
But with affection's yearning. Let us forthwith
Safest defence secure, first for our king,
And then ourselves protect. So sure as hatred,
So sure as thirst for blood, as thirst for gold,
Have prompted these fiends; so most assuredly
Or 'ere the summer sun our fields shall scorch

They will renew the exterminating strife."

"Friends truly tried; whom nor distress has shaken,
Nor privation tired, nor danger driven back,
From the forward path of honour; in loyalty,
In patriotic ardour fully proved.

We have two enemies; one unnatural,

As we are of one blood, the other has cause

Just cause for enmity. Valiant, the Britons

May on the one hand claim their ancient realm;

That is the possible danger, and we dare not

Forget that it is a danger. Imminent,

Perilously imminent is the immediate ill;

Destroy that, and the other will of itself

Itself consume. We then must crush at once

Or never hope to crush, these marauders fierce,

Who trample down our land, destroy our homes,

Pollute our country, and blaspheme that God,

Who need but his eye avert and they would sink,

Then unsustained, into blank nothingness.

In such all-vital contest, it behoves

Christian men and warriors to weigh carefully,

Each near, each distant circumstance, to guard

Against all adverse ill, and to provide

So as to improve success, and aid the strong

By kindness towards the weak.—Well placed, a fortress

Not only will protect Ethelswitha,

My loving, my devoted wife, and my poor babes;

But, from the central point of Æthelingöe

All is within our grasp, and retreat assured,

Should Heaven have sealed our fall. Erect we then

A fort upon the lone isle, a humble site
Yet with advantage pregnant, even as Denulf's heart
Under a rude exterior holds more worth
Than fifty kingdoms. Had not Providence,
In it's inscrutable mercy led me thither,
I know not, had I in forlorn hope to choose
The last place for the deadly struggle, or
For conquest, or defeat. I could have chosen
Concealment closer; and, or the Heaven-born hope
Is but illusion, yet shall the Pagan's pride
Bow to the swineherd. Trusting then to Him
To whom all fate is open, if that fate
Have fixed all our actions, as some erring say;
These our defences perfected, the strife
Again may be encountered. Now to our task
Brave friends, and cheerily."—Some unwary foot
Has crushed the citadel of those small folk,
Who through the live-long days of summer, toil
For Winter's store. Injured, they sit not down
In dejection to despair: their architects
Direct their labourers, all duly tasked
In toil as in obedience; unconfusedly
Arises their Babel, every fragment set
In perfect symmetry, perfectly adapted
To it's own use and end: so the King-Architect
Suggests, directs, controls.—No unwilling hands
Forced into labour, all in heart and soul
Freely devoted, to their task of hope,
Of love, of loyalty. All day, all night,
Through succeeding days and nights, all emulous

O'er marsh, o'er moor, carry on the giant work ;
Of wond'rous length, deep piled, and firmly framed,
With water-loving alder, tough and straight ;
Of oak the piers, and beams, and rails, and planks,
All strictly compacted, each connecting each
And each supporting each. A causeway huge,
And long, and high, of earth, and sod, and stone,
And intertying oak, sleeper, or pile,
As trustworthy or weak the soil ; with labour vast
They raise ; and solid, and upheaving high,
Mounds rivalling hills in bulk. Two towers tall
Of stone unhewn, firmly coigned, and interlaced
With level bond or vertical, as best :
And every bed, and joint, and crevice close
Filled, with concreted sand, and lime, and loam,
Rise in magnificence, beyond all that eye
Had seen, or thought conceived ; and in their joy,
Hill, plain, and forest, emulously contend
The ascending fort to swell.—Quantock with glee
Her rocky stores rolls down : Goathurst her depths
Searches for sturdy oak : plashy Sedge-moor
For moisture enduring stems : nor does Neroche
Hold back her forests hoar : Pedrida deep,
And swift Yeo and Ivel, and fertilizing Tone
Bear on their fluent bosoms, all that Earth
Profusely gives ; and each redundantly,
Yields her own treasures prolific, speckled trout
And silver-glittering eel, conspicuous
Amid the all-sufficing finny food.
Tantunc, and Wellin-tone, and Wifeliscombe,

And Bruggewalter, and Wædmor ; every town,
Village, or lonely homestead, in their strength rise
Aiding the prospering work.—Nor yet alone
Ascends the strong fortress.—Stream, and deluged marsh
Are gay with craft, pinnacle, or coracle ;
Or to convey the stores, or yield defence ;
Each man adept to stretch the oar, or speed
The trembling lance, or launch the winged barb.
Denulf's frail hut, it's infancy forgets,
And shoots up into manhood, strong to bear
The wrongs of this rough world ; humble, yet vast
For his two broad acres, ample to contain
The king's best wealth, and certain to suffice
The widest wants of a contented heart.
Not yet sufficed : stores of all warlike stores,
Of handstones mounds, sheaves of broad-arrows trim,
Tough bows and strong, of a stout yeoman's height,
Lances, and spears, and shields, and bucklers' round,
Supply the fort, the outposts many supply ;
And, from his youth every man a warrior,
By hard toil strung, by desperate warfare trained,
Stands for the contest ready. Inured, oft
From far off circuit to fall suddenly
Upon the enemy's outpost, or to harass
Towns, with them leagued in fear, or policy,
Practised to charge, taught the more difficult
Patience-trying virtue warily to retreat,
Veterans, of science born, more gallant band
Glowed not with warlike heat, or patriot zeal.—
Serenely ends the night, gray-mantled morn

Awakes the rejoicing hours, who blithesome dance
With modest daisies crowned, and the pale flowers
Of genial Spring, tripping over the sunny bank
Or gathering in the glade sweet violets ;
Beauties of retirement, by their virtues mild
Outrivalling the gay obtrusive daffodil
And treasuring love beneath the eye of Scorn.
The ascending sun in the molten mirror, spread
Over Brent-marsh and the King's moor, delighted cools
Her slope rays in the calm transparent wave,
Whose rippling, by the zephyrs gaily urged,
In mimic surges lave the the verdurous isles,
Sedge-crowned, embellishing the inland sea.
Bright shoals, light glittering in the orient beam,
Glide through the embosomed depths o'er fairy woods,
Or thread sub-aqueous forests, or frolicsome
Steal, way lay, and to fright in mirthful sport,
Shoot and dart through many an unwary shoal
Intent but on sober sustenance. The pike
Forgetting his voracity, delightedly
Basks in the sun : the beetle waterman
In his bright burnished boat, in mazy dance
Of intricate circles whirls : the ephemeron,
Sylph of the winged world, springs up elate
Upon filmy wing, her day of angel life
One long long day of happiness : the gnat
Bounds in wild gaiety, and blithesomely
Reels, sets to his partner, springs aside, and vaults
Mad with rapidity. Wheeling widely round
Sweep on extended wings the swallows, blest

Spring's joyous harbingers, or, fluttering swiftly
Gather fresh energy, or skim the plain
Dipping their feathery arms, and leap aloft
Into the streaming meteor dew: and shrill,
Or sharp, or soft, or murmuring, each tribe
Melodiously intonate their harmony
Into one chorus song. All, all is life
Exuberantly everflowing with rich joy.
In vain vast Mendip frowns, or her clefts yawn,
Haunts of terrific monsters, looking death,
Or threatening destruction; the blithe
Floods laugh at the threatening, and the placid plain
Reflects their horrors in sport. It is a day
Of overflowing joy. Nature, in love
Is beneficently smiling; niggard Care
Throws off his homespun, and leaps high with glee.
O'er the bright reflecting lake, orderly float
Streams of white-winged barks; the extended oars
Dipping and feathering, to oft-practised notes
Of horns, of melodious tone.—Sabrina's maids
To listen emerge, of their thrice honoured guests
Highly, proudly conscious; lovely as rapid, Axe,
Usella, and Pedrida, Velox, and Isle,
Scatter from urns of ivory flowers of gold
Gathered from emerald meads. In stately grace
Elately her freight of love, the light keel bears
Alfred and Ethelswith; and Æthelingöe
Gladly her king receives.—No laboured pomp,
No sickening adulation, with feigned cheer
Greet him, but honest, manly-hearted warmth,

The warmth of a people's love, to the lone isle
Commends him ; more truly and more nobly King,
Than when the barbaric trash of royalty
First endiadem'd first enrobed him. Denulf's
Honest and faithful grasp more highly prized,
Than the homage of ten empires. The evening sky
Glares in rich green and gold, gay pageantry
Preluding change : so empires to their fall
Verging, profuse of luxurious gorgeousness,
Splendid as bursting bubbles, glitteringly
Gleam, 'ere the tempest in destructive wrath,
Crush and gloat over them :—Things of a day
To flourish, to be no more.—Over the lake,
Dark with extending shades, the royal pair
Watch the fleet, homeward hastening ; watch it in joy,
In love, in gratitude, in pious hope :
Then, in their lowly palace worshipping,
Thank and praise Him, in whom all powers bear rule,
Totter to their fall, or, taught by adversity,
From the dark dungeon ascend a regal throne.

Gulde, before the grace of conscious worth
Trembles less: some sharp discipline await
Her own rude bearing, her unlicensed tongue ;
Less terrified of Wulf.—As the warm glow
Upon a cottage thatch, winter's hard grasp
Unclenches, until between his fingers hoar,
Flow down the grateful drops ; so the kindly smile,
And gentle voice, and look unauthoritative,
And sympathy in every domestic-grief,
Re-assure the daunted shrew. The rugged rock

Becomes as a polished pebble ; the subduing
Warmth of a woman's love for infancy,
Breaks down her stubborn nature. In her joy
Joyous, the children cling around her neck,
And in her bosom nestle, all rejoicing
In her new dignity of conscious trust ;
And flattered that Ethelswith has her preferred
Even to the daughters of Duke Ethelnoth.
Nor in less dignity her charge assumes
Each it's throne of unhewn wood, exulting in
The pride of property. A mother's love
Radiant in glowing, winning tenderness,
Gloriously glitters in the trembling tear
Of her full happiness. That ingle nook
Holds more than the worth of kingdoms, and the King,
Greater than a king ; is a thrice happy man.—
Lowlily sitting on the rush-strewn floor,
The Lady of Wessex, leans against his knee ;
And Bran, before the blazing hearth outstretched,
Bears with bold Eadwerd his lips lifting up,
Admiring his great teeth, loud-laughingly
Pulling his sleek ears, and with tiny hands
Pushing over the giant bulk : while Æthelflœd
In the staid, the high-headed, the matronly authority
Of two years older, checks the rebellious boy.
In gambol rolling, rolling, he still rolls on,
Until tired, the rosy cheek on Bran's broad breast
Pillows itself, and soon stretched side by side,
The huge paw spread over each, in gentle sleep
The three friends softly rest ; but that with eye

Sleepy yet watchful, and recognizing beat
Of his massive tail, the faithful hound still shews
His knowledge of discourse.—“It was a night
Stormy and dark, the thickly descending snow
Seemed to muffle up all sound, a drowsy sense
Of ~~our~~ ~~consciousness~~ sat brooding o’er
Winchester, and, save that a sweetly solemn chant
Rose from the minster, but to be driven back
By night inhospitable as ever night
Being ~~driving~~ over the earth, it might have been
Type of ~~eternal~~ desolation. Suddenly
A strange, a smothered sound, as though the pulse
Of the very ground were audible, came deepening on,
Yet not more audible :—nearer sensibly
It stopped, and a low-lumbering, heavy fall,
A stifled, muffled groan, a panting breath
Spread paleness over every cheek. Even Athulf paused
It seemed as if some Spirit of the Night
Had buried down another spirit, and unbreathed
Laboured against death. In nervous courage, out
Rushed Eðelric, rushed Weorth ; flickering the light
Of Wælfha’s torch, now in the gusty wind
Flaring, now smouldering, shewed the sinewy
Giant skeleton of Elf, and at his feet
A pagan outstretched and stunned ; in unreasoning haste
Eðelric stabbed him : we could but surmise
The indignant beast had with his rider fled
And shaken him off in scorn. No tidings yet
Had of your warfare reached us. Smitten down
Every fond hope, with eyes aghast we stared

At the dead man, at the scarcely less dying horse,
So sore had been his speed. The noble beast
Seemed agonized, that he had not power of speech,
And touched us with his teeth, and looked afar,
Straining as at some fixed object ; and the dogs
Disturbed and restless, wandered, and looked up,
And scratched, and whined. Some sad intelligence
They had gathered but could not communicate.—All felt
That Alfred had been slain.—A dreary hope
After long sorrow, a lone dreamy hope
As it were the dying of sorrow, and that her soul
Had been born an encouraging angel, gently arose
And then blossomed into life.—Strongly assured,
As by some superior power ; it whispered not,
It came not in a dream, yet my whole spirit
Assured me you was safe : I was assured,
And in that strong assurance, as assured
Of Heaven's protecting power, bade them bowne
Themselves for a distant journey ; they in dread
Of learning all they feared ; I in fond hope
Of knowing all I wished.—Whither to turn
We knew not : even the holy men who strove
In prayer could not direct.—Prayer in strong faith,
Prayer in sure hope, composed and cheered our souls,
Gave us living energy, and confidence
To try our own strength, then to trust in Heaven's
All certain help.—We brought before poor Elf,
And before the dogs, your falcons, weapons, clothing :
He neighed, and pressed impatient ; brave old Bran
Took up the scent, muttered a low, short growl

Of sturdy resolve, and on, with nose to ground
Led, stopped, returned ; led over the same track,
Returned, and led again ; looking elate,
Yet looking reproachfully, that our dull senses
Lagged behind his.—We followed then at his heels,
Slowly indeed, but certainly ; now at stretch,
Now painfully bewildered ; to and fro
Trying, and far and wide ; catching the scent,
And now again at fault.—Intelligence
Lighted up the steed's straining eye, and the quick ear
Drank in sounds once heard, now again recognized.
Path stream or mead, old friends, allured him on
No rider to misguide, for his honest back
Refused all burthen ; to Wiltune, to Andeofre,
Through Chute to Savernake : there all scent lost
In irremediable confusion, stumbling on
We knelt for aid.—A feeble, a glimmering light
Seemed to start up, then faded :—Ethelfrith
And three of the thegns, threaded the mazy darkness :
Leofric and Lucumon can tell you how
They met, and fared, in that wild fearful haunt ;
But we rejoiced : they had not seen you slain
And that fed hope :—With stealthy step and slow,
Straitened in food, daring scarcely to wake up
Fire, to prepare the produce of our bolts,
In sharpened search for game, Leofric a gleam,
A little star of light, as a glow-worm's lamp
Perceived ; it issued from the cavernous skull
Of a huge skeleton ; a few more steps,
Another lay coiled up ; still further on

Another stretched out ; and, yet buried in the spine,
The blade of your own sword. Elf neighed, then checked
The merry sound ; danger had taught him heed.
Still some exciting recollection marked
His every action ; down a threatening steep,
Dangerous to man, yet on he fearlessly
Led us to a heap of armour, soiled, and rusted :
But it was Alfred's, and the battle-cry
Rose to our lips :—thankfully, thoughtfully,
Carefully, diligently, tracing, retracing,
Hollow, or nook, or glen ; hillock, or plain
We coned to recover scent :—in a deep cleft,
Matted with withered weeds, trampled, tangled, torn,
At length the clue he found ; the whimpering
Vibrating in every bosom, on we held,
He in the watercourse, we tramping along
Through a fiery devastation, widely exposed
To every hostile eye : yet through that waste,
That horrible waste of death, where Silence sat
Dreading lest she should hear herself ; in Heaven's love
We passed unchallenged, unharmed. You can relate
Our latest deliverance—Bran, noble Bran,
Good, faithful dog,”—Thick and fast the gushing tears,
Over the worthy dog and her dear babes
Fall, a pure offering ; and the glistening eyes
And the uplifted lips, affectionately
Seek for their fond reward.—So sit they through
The early half of eve ; mutually relating
Their woes, their joys, in mutually cheering hope
Of future days of peace.—Smiling, Raphaël dwells

In transport upon their pleasures, only less
Than Heaven's, in their evanescence ; and confirms
Their confiding trust in the kind Providence,
Which o'er the good it's peaceful mantle throws.

Alfred, all converse ceased ; from the Holy-Book
Reads the wondrous history of Him who shrouded
The Eternal Majesty in man's frail form ;
And, as a man, endured the bitter scoff,
Anger, and hatred, reproach, and contumely,
Hardship, and sorrow, and meagre poverty,
All righteousness fulfilling ; at the hands
Of those he came to reprove, to teach, to save :
Suffered a shameful, an ignominious death,
In Sacrifice for them who made him a sacrifice ;
And, for their guilt imploring pardon, died.
They sit, that wondrous life contemplating,
In glowing, in loving, in melting thankfulness ;
Forgetting the silent, unretracing step
Which carries on the thread of human life,
And on Eternity's threshold snaps it short.—

The rain pours hard, in fitful gusts the wind
Shakes at the casement, smites the creaking door,
Wails in the trees, howls through the pervious bridge,
Moans round the sturdy towers, sobs and shrieks
As a tormented fiend, and away flees
But to renew the assault.—A soft, low knock
Heard, in distinctness of sound, from the wild wind,
Attention excites,—a weak, a plaintive voice
Sustenance craves :—Bran rears his mighty bulk,
Paces the door, draws his breath hard, and snorts,

And whimpers, and whines ; and with a gentle foot
Scratches along the threshold :—Readily
Trusting in his dog's approved sagacity,
Alfred the door unbars :—An old, old man,
Bent, not bowed down, hale in antiquity,
The scattered hair and beard as a wreath of snow
Over his breast sweeping, streaming around his staff ;
Drenched even to dripping, but a morsel craves
Of bread for needful sustenance ; he is bound
On a weary journey and has exhausted all
His frugal store of food. With welcoming hand
Kindly assisting, for that himself had known
The heart of a stranger, the compassionate
King, who had erst in his high pride of place
Selfishly forgetting, petulantly repelling
The most sacred duty of the regal throne,
Spurned the imploring poor man, smarting under
The galling oppression, the unfeeling scorn
Of men who called themselves noble ; using power
All to crush down who would not lick their feet,
And kiss the insolent hand that smote upon,
And in it's gripe clenched them ; from the poor man wringing
The bare, hard pittance of horny industry,
And, in the dreary wretchedness rioting
Of those whom God made equals, man made slaves.
Bitter, thrice bitter, bitter, most bitter to them,
That bitterest curse, which but abides the time
Of biting, consuming vengeance, when their dead
Shall into life start up, and every life
Shall be as a burning viper. With kind care,

With attentive tenderness, in his own seat
He the way-farer places.—Cold-palsied the hand
Glow beneath the chafing palm of Eahlswitha :
The dripping garments dried, a cheering warmth
Through the veins courses ; fresh youth o'er his brow
Beams, a May-morning of serenity.
Scanty the table, scantier the food ;
Unforethought, in the day of gaiety
Unrecking the night of care, had but stored up
One spare cut loaf, one cup of temperate wine,
For them insufficient ; and by Gullde spread
In ostentation of it's insufficiency.—
Kind words a feast, with hospitable cheer
Alfred the halved loaf offers, and the cup
Their guest to enliven : “ It is but little, my father,
It is but coarse, but it has hearty blessing ;
Poor though we be, to morrow's sun may see,
If Providence give vigour to my arm,
An overladen board ; and, if not so,
One day of fasting will not harm our health,
But savour food the more when appetite
Shall find her table spread : drink, drink my sire
He who the widow's cruise and cake of meal
Made all-sufficing, can, if he so please,
Bid the wine-vat overflow, as he has made
Our cheered hearts overbrim with thankfulness :
Drink, stranger, drink.”—Nor does the aged man
The proffered cup refuse, and humble food ;
But, satiate with little, girds his loins,
Secures his sandals, and with trusty staff

Addresses himself to his journey, though his host
Presses his longer stay, lest that murk night
Betray his untutored step in such rude wild.
“Waste and wild must be that howling wilderness
Whereon the smile of God’s good providence
Does not alight ; and that board famine-stricken
Which cannot bid a guest welcome : I have been
Fed by my fellow man, shall I not trust in God ?
Nay, my young friend, the sun’s bed can be traced
As she wheels round the hills, and I have fared
Too long upon life’s journey, not to know
That lode-star to my path. Fare, fare thee well.
Yet, ’ere we part—these aged eyes have seen
Kindness made kinder, by the gentle art
Of binding kindness up in duty’s garb ;
That poverty can gild it’s lowliest fare
With glories kings shall never over peer ;
That the peasant garb a nobler heart may hold
Than silken robe or fur of costliest price ;
And may my blessing—an old man’s good will
Never can do you harm,—rest upon your heads
As Heaven’s benediction.—Human sight
Cannot foresee the deep things hidden in time
Yet immature ; but—and the kindling voice
Assumes a deep tone of rapture, as if the spirit
Had burst it’s earthly bond, and soared, and saw,
And heard Futurity with assured voice,
And prophetic ecstasy, reveal in Time
The secrets of Eternity—Yet will be
A noble path set open for thy feet,

Strait, stern, and rugged, yet an ascending path.
This rude cot cannot hold thee ; wide and large
Shall be thy dwelling ; arms, arms, flashing arms
Shall gleam upon thee ; honour, fame, glory, shall
Blazon thy high exploits ; yet thou shalt be,
Aye, even the noblest man that ever trod,
That ever yet shall tread this glorious soil,
This soil of freedom.—In deepest misery
Wessex shall hold her spread hands out to thee,
And thou—thou shalt fill them—thou shalt raise her up,
Shalt be her rescuer,—shalt be her King.
Rule thou in justice, rule thou in honour, rule,
Rule thou in mercy, in love ;—above all
Rule thou, in the fear of God.”—The excited tone
Softens into low, and measured accents mild ;
And, bowing upon his staff, the aged man
Looks upon the children lovingly, as sleep
Weighs down their eyelids, and the majestic hound
Coiled around them in careful jealousy, brightens up
The traveller’s glance beneath. “These beauteous babes
Be to thee blessing and comfort ; may thy life
Be in their virtues repeated ; may their deaths
Ever re-unite you in that pure, bright heaven
Unto which all aspire.—The goodliest blessing,
The dearest blessing Heaven has yet in store,
Alight, and rest upon, and dwell with you.
Ye have an old man’s blessing—fare ye well.”—

With steady step and slow, and onward bent,
Into the gloom he walks ; they silently
Overawed, look upon that onward path

Until all is unbroken darkness.—Yet they feel
That blessing has alighted on them, and would fain
Believe it a heavenly vision.—Memory
Unveils her hidden stores: though resolutely
Barred and trampled down, by self-sufficiency,
In obstinate pertinaciousness.—Silently,
Stern retrospection points to the impress deep
In that mysterious web whose meshes hold
Inextricably, the secrets thoughts, the words,
The deeds of a whole life; and Alfred hears,
Hears in contrition, Neotus his friend,
In blood and in faith his kinsman; with mild voice
His failings, his vices rebuke;—authoritatively
As doing God's work, and yet affectionately
As but himself a weak, sinful, erring man:
Entreating him, in the insane career to pause
Of arrogant pride, of cruel tyranny;
And in alluring mercy promising
The healing of offence.—Apart he sits
Communing with his spirit.—Few the tears,
Few the secret words, but they are words and tears
Of holiest sorrow.—He arises cheered
As that his soul were purified: and, but a shade
Of calm regret that death's dark barrier
Lies between him and his monitor, he joys
That he has wept and prayed.—Night fleets along
Her interminable circuit, holding half
The globe in her gliding grasp: now calm, now hushed,
In deepest stillness,—save that the cricket's song,
Her cheering, ringing song, blest song of home,

Of home's dear endearments and comforts ; and the snare
Of the mouldering embers, bids consoling sleep,
Fillow and curtain them with her downy wing.—
Ere the rude pallet lap their relaxing limbs,
Alfred and Eahlswith, Denulf and Gulle, kneel,
And to the dread Preserver, Alfred prays.—
" God of my fathers ! my redeeming God,
Who so mysteriously hast led me on
To regain my people's love, to curb my own
Overweening pride, to know myself again,
Not a vain insolent king, but as thy child.
Placed in a throne but to serve and to obey
Thy bidding. as angels excellent in strength,
Mighty in power, in wisdom supereminently
Beyond all earth's treasured knowledge, willingly,
Gladly, rejoicingly, on the least of all
Thine errands of mercy, hie with instant speed,
Thy service exalting them all height above.
All future life throughout, so lead me on,
That knowing how, that knowing why I fell,
All foregone sins may be effaced and lost,
In the affectionate oblivion of my true,
King-loving, loyal people ; so that all time,
May look back to this time, and know how strong,
How truly unconquerable is such a king
And such a condescending nation :—Be to all
Our King, our Lord, our God ; and, as we cleave
In humble hope to thee, so to us cleave
In mercy, in yearning love.—In my adventurous
Perilous way firing, protect me still ;

And, when the day of decision shall arrive,
When thy right arm in vengeance shall awake,
When thou shalt rise, from this fair land to sweep
Thy foes ; insulting thee by idolatry,
The foul sin which thou abhorrest, over us
In the red-raging battle, wave on high
Thy all-protecting shield : in that red wrath
Remember thy loving mercy ; and thy faith,
Thy holy, pure, thy heaven-securing faith,
Exalt, diffuse ; and if so glad an end
May be ; make me thy hallowed instrument
To spread that faith of love ; and, conquering,
Subdue them but to increase that empire broad
Which must all Earth embrace, and all Earth make
Even as joyous Heaven. Upon my Eahlswitha,
My Æthelfloed, my Eadwerd, in thy rich love
Pour down glad peace of heart, glad peace of soul ;
Pour upon them thy holiest influence,
Pour, pour upon all my friends, upon all my foes
The choicest of thy blessings ; in our joys
Teach us to know whence every blessing flows ;
Lead us to honour thee, lead us to obey,
Lead us to love thee, and in that rejoicing love
To live and to die in thee.”—The pallet rude,
The lowly shielding, to their happy hearts
Even effeminate luxuries ; the wing
Of dewy slumber, needs but to wave it’s plumes,
And, in the peace of Heaven, they calmly sleep.—

Not so the general foes of God and Man :—
Long had they sat in stupid astonishment,

Their sleight, their power, so manifestly curbed :
Heimdaller and Vidar most depressed, and seeking
Congenial gloom wherein themselves to conceal,
And avoid reproach, covert or threatening,
For their blank failure. Long they brooding sat,
Long day, long night, as on earth rule day and night,
Self-questioning, if from Nifl-heim to call
Lark for aid : yet dreading the father of fraud
Would their devices traverse. By thought wearied
Odin, from Mimer's head by darkling spell,
(So darkling in superstition demons grope)
Seeks resolution of his questioning,
But mute is wise Mimer's head.—On his black steed,
Deep down, once more he threads the terrible
Path of horrible Hell, there, through a thousand years
Of snow-storm high heaped, strives to dissolve the slumber
The dreary death-sleep of Volva. Volva fears not
His powerful, his Runic spell, spell to awaken
The spirits of dead men, spell to disclose
The treasures of the grave-mound, spell to cleave,
To dissolve the enduring mountains, to unveil
The pregnant germs of Nature ; now powerless,
Deceitful, vain : upward, he mournfully
Turning his haggard horse, to the Rymthussi
His way desponding takes ; there at the prescient
Fount seeks response.—Blackening, the water shrinks
From empty Giallia-horn, Mimir spreads o'er
The depth his withered hand ; an eye of fire,
His eye left in pledge, glares on him. With head bowed
Even to his heaving breast, droopingly on

He passes, through Asaheim :—Asaheim eclipsed,
Dark, cheerless, confused, to awful Urdar-brun.
From the mysterious vase of wisdom's mead,
Odræsis, wont by the gods to be implored
Asks he reply ; with stately, commanding mien
Waving her backward palm, Urda repels
The Chief of Deities : threatening her frown
Forbidding all reply. Scorned and repulsed
By her whom superior deities had entrusted
With power to curb earthly gods, gods who but work
The will of others, their masters ; Pride and shame,
Anguish and rage, to be enmeshed and foiled
By his own devices, devices to enslave
To chain down the souls of men ; by long prescription
Held as the laws of fate, until the liars
Believed the lies they forged : Gods now to be gibed
By their own fooleries :—wide the aroused fiend
Throws off the superstition ; upon himself
Relies alone ; in his own naked might
A fiend, nought but a fiend, he towers sublime
A moving mountain, proudly measureless
In bulk as strength, to none inferior ;
Or if inferior, to none less he
Than the Sovereign of Hell.—Athwart wide earth,
Around the waste of waters moodily,
Revengefully he stalks : his deep sunk eyes,
Cavernous horrors, wandering fires to blight,
To devour all human hope, averted far
In scornful hatred from the joyous field
Of Alfred's honour ; terrifically fierce

Glare on a lonely ship, creaking, tempest torn,
Freighted with famished men : in vengeful sport
Gripping, he hurls her along the ocean foam,
She strikes, she whirls, she sinks ; his eager eye
Watches, grinning in horrid joy, the ill-starred hulk
Swallowing a deluge, and her freight ill-starred,
Fighting as resolute warriors, struggling
Against death and doom, boldly determining,
If for death marked, as warlike men to die
Laughing at danger : entering Odin's hall
As rightful possessors.—Over Abyrig
Waving his baleful pennons, down he drops
Affrighting his shrinking comrades, who in awe
And breath-restraining wonder, hear him speak :
“ Comrades, companions, compeers, co-mates, friends,
Ill fits us now our titled worth to boast,
And talk of dominations, or pryncedoms vast,
Until we have re-conquered those domains,
And extensive principalities, and realms.—
The chilliest hour has passed ; the deepest gloom
Now is dispersing ; our brilliant star of hope
Is ascending to her zenithed splendour broad :
Hubba is dead, daring Hrafn has been torn
Has been dabbled in his blood. As the crushed egg
Breaks out into a viper, from that death
Spring up ten-thousand brave men to avenge
Him, to restore our honour, restore our faith,
Restore our worship, our high renown restore ;
Wider spread our empire, and destroy that faith,
That worship, that empire, which our right usurps,

And that usurper unthroned, who from our throne
Hopes to control all earth, and in his hell,
In his own hell bind him fast. Hubba's black ship
Is sport for the sea-mews, Hubba's gallant crew
Food for sea-monsters, but Hubba's heroic chiefs
Land now in Wessex.—As a wildfire train
Touched by a spark, across the heath carcasses;
So shall their wildfire vengeance light up a blaze
That Raphaël or Michaël, or ten thousand
Michaëls and Raphaëls, shall in vain attempt
To trample down, or to extinguish. And shall Hrafn
Be torn sacrilegiously? shall Hubba's bones
Whiten on the sea-beach? sooner shall the heaven
Bow down and kiss the earth, than Guthrun stay
One step in his career. Up then my friends!
Up and rejoice! up, and with standard broad
Flaunt the wide sky, and at defiance set
This gossamer legion: up and be doing
Or never expect success."—Beneath the frown
Of an offended pedagogue, sit mute,
Or, glancing furtively from rank to rank,
Corrected children:—all his object gained,
The forehead again expands, and the bland smile
Lights up gladness in every bosom, and with shout,
And riotous revelry they outward pour,
Run, leap, or, pitching upon practised hands
Roll over, and stand erect, and ring the sky
With "holiday, holiday"!—So sudden the change
From abject terror to defying threats,
In the invigorated demons; each on high

Raising his plumed head, proudly displaying
His well-appointed mail, his heavy lance,
His sun-reflecting shield; standard, gonfalon,
Float high, float wide.—So magical the change
Even Odin paces back. “Tis well ye Gods:
None less than Gods have such heroic part.
So be it in the battle, when engaged
We shock with the angelic host, and drive them hence.
Less than such triumph cannot from such strength
But be the assured result. Yet must we guard
Warily against mischance; such and mischance
Of battle, as once betrayed us, when Victory
Fluttered over us in hope. The foe less bold,
Strategem arguing want of confidence,
Gives us assured hope. Peace-rusted strength
Ill can contend against our veteran arms
Polished by constant use, wielded by limbs
Unenervate by pale sloth. The foe, less bold,
Has by some sleight the destructive fate concealed
Of Amund and his host. They have been destroyed
Or these well practised eyes their march had seen;
And even now, as if the yearning earth
Yielded warriors fully armed, from every field
The Christian host, under that recreant,
Who by some other sleight has risen up
Yet fresh, yet vigorous; will, ’ere the moon shall turn
Half of his placid disc, sore assault make
On our votaries, our confederates; and again
The powers of upper air, so let me term
These eye-dazzling campaigners, will not withdraw

Their puissant aid ; behoves us then to meet
Sleight with greater cunning, strength with mightier strength :
Nor light that contest, when such vast result
As we and ours, or his and only his,
Poise in the balance ; and the heaviest sword
Must depress the winner's scale."—Pre-eminent
In majesty, in grandeur, Satan stands
Amidst the assembled host ; as them in arms,
As them in overweening confidence.
Cast off the scrutiny-barring mist wherefrom
He saw, he heard unseen ; and graciously
Greets his well-proven compeers, bends to all
In condescending courtesy, and speaks :
"Well am I pleased, Princes, and Powers of Heaven !
Less than of Heaven such powers can never be,
Or if ever, but for transient space : Odin has spoken
As ourself would have spoken, and to me
It but belongs to caution, not to urge
Such powers to noblest daring ; for I see
Your hearts are in your eyes, and every eye
Beams courage, and valour, and resolution stern ;
Virtues of warriors, nurtured by toil and strife,
The breasts of Experience, whose energetic milk
Has given ye vigour, and whose dangerous school
Has tutored ye for deeds of glory. Curb your rage,
Let judgment hold it in restraining leash,
Until the hostile line shall waver, then
Let slip your fury, cleave a world-wide breach,
Storm it, and never cry hold. Decision
Of this strife is with us. Victory the harlot

Re-slays the giants, bullying, blustering Thor,
Skirner sweeps off armies with his wondrous swo
Heimdaller sounds his loud Giallar-horn,
Tyr smites with his strong left hand, Vali and U
Twang their resounding bows, and Brage high
Strikes his resounding harp, and sings the praise
Of triumphs yet in embryo, deeds unborn.

A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

BOOK THE TENTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E T E N T H .

At the Spring-sacrifice for Victory, the survivors of Hubba's fleet bring intelligence of his death, and the Pagans elect another War-King.

Conquerors, tyrants : ye whose lust of power
Recks not a nation's misery ; who gild
Your sordid avarice with glory's name,
And render yourselves immortal in the scorn
And indignant detestation of all time ;
Hear, hear your fate.—Injustice may oppress
May crush may trample down ;—the weak may sink,
The poor may pine, the strong may be hurled down,
And chains, and torments, and despairing groans,
Your greatness may attest.—Your throne may be

Cemented firm by blood, and slavish tongues,
And slavish hands, and slavish energies,
May loudly acclaim ye ; bear ye on their palms,
And roll along your reeking chariot foul,
Defiled, and execrable.—Your crown is blood,
Your sceptre blood, robes, throne, blood, wholly blood,
Blood that cries out for vengeance. Vengeance hears ;
Before her glaring eyes your proudest might
Withers and shrivels up, and Retribution
Writes ignominious shame upon your graves.

The lofty towers of Royal Cyppanhamme
Glowed with the pomp of execrable war,
The war of aggrandizement, ambition's war :
And, glorying in blood-stained trophies, Ethelwulph
With Burrhed ratified unholy league ;
Lighted the nuptial torch. Ethelswitha
The victim queen, sat on the Mercian throne,
Gladness and triumph shouted.—Three short years
And, Ethelwulph dethroned, in weariness
Eked out two years of shadowy dignity.
Three years elapsed,—the incestuous usurper's grave
Gaped, and he was not.—Burrhed the Mercian, he
He who could lead the daring war, whose might,
Whose overwhelming power could smite down
Mertyn the British king ; whose furious wrath
Could ravage Aungulsœ, though he could not break
The strength of chivalrous Roderic : he whose pride
Slaughtered his people by their foemen's swords :
Bought, paid for his glory, with their lavished blood :
Who, on the orphan's tear and widow's groan

Founded his splendour ; hears the widow's groan,
Hears the perishing orphan's cry, hears the red blood
Of his murdered people crying aloud to Heaven,
And terror-stricken stands. The swords which might
Have stayed a ruthless foe, deep in the grave
Lie powerless with rust ; the tears, the prayers,
Which might have drawn down Heaven, wail into curses ;
And outcast, and abhorred, in deadliest fear
His paralysed hands imploring seek
The pity he denied. Leagues stretch between
His kingdom and his grave : his realm, his race,
Were—and are not.—Penda's and Offa's crimes
Consummated by him, have blotted out
A nation ; and the abettor of his guilt
Feels the contaminating poison, burning
Every vein, every artery.—The heart of Wessex
Throbs with avenging terror.—Cyppanhamme
The proud, the rejoiced, the peerless, sorely smitten
Shrieks beneath a conqueror's heel ; her lordly towers
Re-echo riot, re-echo misery, re-echo
Sobs, groans, and lamentation.—Abona
Trembles through all her streams, and shuddering,
Hides her stained, her polluted head ; polluted, stained
With expiating blood.—Deep shrouded, deep
In infamy of darkness ; shuddering, moaning,
An anguish-tortured spirit, agonized
By the harvest of his own sowing, gasping sees
His country desolate, her smiling fields
Ravaged, strewn over with ashes ; sees, driven out
To penury, to woe, bread to implore

In foreign lands, his subjects ; and his son,
That dear child of his love, that cherished child,
That child of his proud fondness, king anointed,
King in prophetic vision, vilely driven
From home, from king-ryke, stabling among swine,
A beggar, and a robber : sees from the fane
Where he had sacrificed, where he had sacrificed
His daughter at the shrine of avarice,
The avarice of ambition ; Pagan bands
Tramping in measured march, in splendour proud
Proud as his own insatiate armies, splendid
As himself in his height of power, to implore
Their demon gods ; and, hot from the altar fire
To sweep in unextinguishable rage
A vengeful hurricane, a hurricane
To sweep as a besom the blood-tainted soil,
To hurl all into the ocean, to deface,
To defile, to render loathsome and abhorred,
The Cross, the altar, and to rear sublime
Their power and their empire.—Long drawn the line
In martial splendour and in priestly pomp,
Ascends the verdant hill, o'erspans the plain,
A bannered host and huge, of distant lands
Hostile or disunited, plundered oft
As mutually plundering ; even in faith
Diverse, incongruous, acknowledging
No head but their untamed wills, yet now firm bound
By the aggregating influence of revenge,
Avarice, or thirst of blood : all, all as one
Bent to repel, to destroy, to extirpate

That faith, which cannot brook idolatry ;
That faith of a pure heart, which palters not,
Which coalesces not, which sanctifies not,
Vice, crime, or sin ; but in it's holiness
Rejects all that is unholy, and bows down
The creature to the Creator.—Onward they move
To music loud and dissonant, as stream
Harsh-clanging and vociferous, high in air
Bound to congenial clime for food, or bent
To perpetuate their race, cranes, storks, or swans,
Startling night's leaden ear.—Nine times nine bands
The sacrificial ale, in vessels vast,
Beneath the weight bear staggering. Nine times
Nine sturdy bands, the exhilarating mead
With thirsty speed bear on. Thrice nine times nine
Cauldrons of massive bulk, resplendent brass
Graven with Runic-spell of wondrous power,
Significant and sanctifying. Nine times nine
Baskets of savoury cakes, sweet, and strewn over
With odorous, pungent seeds. Nine full-fed steers
Heavy and huge, bright spring flower burthens bear
Wreathing their horns, and flowing down their necks,
To the deep-pendent dewlap. Stallions nine
Of noble lineage, in war renowned,
Large shouldered and full flanked ; each flaky mane
Wont to outroar the tempest, each a storm
Of desolating fury ; fires resistless
Flash from their eyeballs, deep their nostrils broad
Out-clamour the trumpet's blast, terror precedes,
Death follows. Thick, their short powerful necks

And over their flanks, broad-horned their resolute heads,
 Nine in-pace pace along, proudly pace along,
 As Timginster and Timginster, in the car
 Of Thrautanger's mighty thunderer. Nine rams
 Of innal and Inenge high, of fleeces pure
 As the white flock that to the parched earth
 Promises early rain. Nine falcons fierce,
 And bold and daring; strong their far-stretching wings
 To spring on the elastic air and gain the sky
 For above Drevelfeld, or Skagloss huge;
 There, silencing peace, gather the hurricane
 And high-sweeping, plunge. Nine golden-plumed
 Gannets of noblest race, tall, proud, and strong,
 Gannets glowing beside the bright sun,
 Gannets contempt and defiance, high and scornfully
 Their threatening heads erect, flap their strong wings,
 And at the wide world challenge, that Hrosvelger
 Tronies in the utmost North, where day and night
 Show eternally the earth. Three sheep-dogs rough,
 Trusty, intelligent. Three mastiffs staid
 Broad-mouthed and massy limbed, courageous,
 And powerful and generous, and affectionate,
 For the little morning breeze. Three sleuth-hounds tall
 Deep-fowed, large eared, each broad front arching high,
 Stern thoughtfulness upon their noble brows,
 Full of discretion, steady with resolve,
 Stead eyes of bravest daring: broad their chests,
 Compactly muscular each giant limb,
 And hard their sounding flanks: vast Gimer's child
 Geric the beautiful, had not stouter guard

When Skirner sought her hand the fire to cool,
Consuming Frey's secret soul : so faultless all
That superstition pauses, loath to destroy
Nature's so perfect work.—Holy the twelve,
By long-respected custom who preside
At the sacrificial feast ; king, priest, and judge,
Their chief in his ancient realm, revered, and held
Interpreter of gods, when oracles
Respond in sentence dark, or omens deep
Mutter in thunder, wave the raven's wing,
Chime in the murmuring fount, or tinkling rill,
Moan in the forest, intone the sonorous rock,
Gurgle in the mantling pool, or from the hearth
Leap with sooth laden ; march on statelily,
Acknowledging no reverence, absorbed
In meditation sacred.—Armed in full,
As a warrior erectly bold, his bright blue sword
Golden hilted and engemmed, his golden helm
High-crested, his heroic shoulders broad
Bearing the mystic ravens ; lordlily
Frowns Odin, borne in state, borne up by nine
Stout warriors stark and stern ; borne up by nine,
Thor, crowned and sceptred, in his better hand
Holding Mjolner ; his strong-clasped loins
Girt with the belt which doubles his vast might ;
King of the thunder roar, and vengeful bolt,
Majestically smiles. Equally borne
Between them, Asaheim's exalted queen
In radiant glory glows, her silken vesture
Embroidered with bright gold, flowing her hair

Knitted with gold, her pregnant bosom gold,
Her tiara purest gold ; and gems, and chains,
Glittering and blazing, o'er the daunted crowd
Shed terror, command veneration.—To the Gods
In god-like state travelling, on floating folds
Of gorgeous drapery, as if self-sustained,
Self-moving, every human aid concealed ;
Prone in the dust, bowing, kneeling, grovelling,
Shading their eyes from the insufferable light,
And trembling before their own handy work, warriors
As shrieking women fall, and women, shrieking
In maddened transport, hail, and praise, and bless,
Invoke, and supplicate ; then hurry on,
Repeating, again repeating at each pause,
Enfuriate the adoration.—Proud in their state,
In effulgent panoply magnificent,
Ride along the ruthless chieftains : wide displayed
Esbern of Nordalbingia waves on high
The Standard, bearing in a silver field
A serpent vast, threatening, voluminous,
Wrought in far-beaming gold : effulgently
The monster shakes his glittering scales, and darts
From his eyes appalling fury ; as streaming far
It flaunts the ascending sun. Esbern's good sword
Flashes, oft dyed in blood, yet to be stained
Oft, 'ere Ellisof grant his ardent suit.
Handsome, and tall, and large, and resolute,
Consummate warrior ne'er honoured lady's love
More than the gallant hero. Coy as cold
She listens not, until more daring deeds

Attest his high repute, her brilliant charms.
Devoted he now lives :—or Esbern dies,
Or Wessex is destroyed.—Eric Eymundsson,
King of Suithiod the less and her fair provinces,
Brooks not a slothful son ; Ivar in arms,
War-son to Guthrun, learns in hardiest deeds
His sire to emulate : a stripling youth
Generous, brave, and daring ; manly pride
Sits on his open front, alert energy
In his blue eye glances ; many a yearning heart
For young Ivar throbs, and many a secret prayer
At Freya's footstool sighs :—he sighs for none.—
Harald the son of Eric, king by right
Of Wendel-land, owning the force perforce
Of Gormo, he whom Gida's message of scorn,
When Haarfager sued in vain, inciting held
As an exemplar to her king ; ambition's flame,
Lighting with the torch of love : no trembling spark
To flicker and die out, but vigorous
As her high-spirited virtue, biting
As her proud, her contemptuous tongue. Ruin,
Misery, destruction, exile, stern chastisers ;
Have from her noble heart issued to scourge
And to purify a world. Harald, his hungry axe
Stimulates with slaughter, inebriates with blood,
And in his valour glories ; deeds his words :
Champions more daring than the resolute youths
Manned not the barks that o'er the blue sea wave
Bore along hardy marauders. Oskytul
Bids Mercia's banner float, the vaunted prize

Then he the iron lightning of Hreosnath,
 The runestone he struck it into the earth
 And descending it fell : soil stained with his true blood,
 The golden dragon he through a crimson cloud
 Descending the wound. Eadwara and Hrothulf, friends
 Of Eadwara and Sigefrid, whose pale death
 Stretched in Aelfric : from the Kinnari crew
 Boasting their image : crafty as ferocious,
 In Eadwara's hall secretly they
 Lurked in the evening late sweeping, their barks
 Flew over the fender : while their huge long swords
 Shone over the marching crews : rich Sciringshael
 Adorned their marching inv. Osio-ford
 The iron-wood Drommen their axes mingling,
 Their iron-wood strong. Revengeful fire
 Cried round their golden halls : now their whole wealth
 Is plunder and their great swords. That banner proud
 Borne by strong Eadwara's so guarded braves
 The iron hall falling. Eadwara
 Towers in bulk a mountain among hills,
 Nothing his golden helm a gyphon's head
 Crying and grinning : through the iron teeth
 Looking into horrors at the threatening
 Of the great Eadwara. Struck the old
 Eadwara's arm the aged, Oie slew,
 Eadwara's prime. Scithra's usurper king.
 And he whose night no wary men
 Should sleep, he at whom the sapling oak
 Vibrated its tremulous hold : he who with Ring,
 Ragnar's bold son, fought against Sigefrid,

From Starkod his lineage tracing, in his honour
Poured water upon his child, and that proud name
Upon the boy invoked ; hence Starkod called,
And from his shoulders vast, in after age
Herdabreid surnamed. With no hauberk armed
In his broad belt a sword of temper true,
Ravager named, and, trembling as he stalks,
The spear shaft every other grasp deriding
With golden inlay blazes, and fierce lightnings
Flash from the bickering point. Broad his red shield
A raging lion bears : an Elk's vast hide
Hangs from his shoulders huge ; a goodlier man
Earth never looked upon, nor braver foe
Did warrior ever meet. Rekoni, Reas
Of Narowa, Wolmar and Steinortz strong
Of Adalsyssel, Gudleif of Gardarige,
Rut of Stavanger-fiord, Korm-Ærver, tough
As his own bow, and swift as his own barb,
Of Rogenfoss in Tellemarken. He had stayed
His farm to cultivate, his woods to thread,
His own steep rocks to climb ; but 'ere he died
His vi-king father, scorning the sportsman's-craft,
Buried his plundered stores. Beggared as a king
The bright waves beckoned him ; one bounding bark
His kingdom and his wealth, no sooty roof-tree
Ever sees him sleep beneath it, never sits he
Before an ignoble hearth. Ulf-Rode and Thorstein,
Sigtryg and Asbiorn-Selsbein, Einar, surnamed
Rangmud from his mouth uneven, share his fate.
Men of Tellemarken, armed with smooth horn bows

And such great arrows. Sigmund Haming's father
 Soul-quickening and soul-fetter: of Haming his
 Strongest and truest friend, worthy Sigmund,
 Fierce and ready, prompt the men to plunge
 Into the shimmering whale, to watch his rise
 And plunge and plunge again, until the blue waves
 Flow purple with his gore. O'er the old
 Chief of men Angvold's:—Angvold, stout king,
 Went in noble service to her whose milk
 His mother's breast supplied, in deadly feud
 Fell before King Vana: on his funeral mound
 Still stands the moss-covered stone, and at his feet
 Lie his four-footed geldings. Raised from his name
 The regal hall, and the southern point of Karmø,
 Distinguish Halm's-ford. Of Agneth
 In Stockholm, Geste the grim warrior
 Rockless and fierce bears on his frowning brow
 The terror of his name. Agne the powerful
 Slew Froste of Finnland, burnt his hall, destroyed
 Far and wide his kingdom; Skialf bore away
 And, sailing West, made land at Stokkasund,
 Raised his high tent beneath a pendent wood,
 Spread the rich feast, and claimed her virgin hand.
 Flattering, she entreated 'ere nuptial rites began
 'The funeral feast to hold, lest that Froste's soul
 Unasily should rest. Enamoured the king
 Bade the huge tables groan, the guests drank hard
 And praised the king and shouted, "Health to the soul of Froste!
 Health to Skialf the lovely"! Strong the ale,
 Strong the bright-sparkling mead, draughts unrestrained

Round coursed and round, and round impetuously
Whirled the king's maddened brain : Skialf, endearingly,
Around his glowing neck her soft arms wound,
Warning him his wealth to guard : the twisted gold
Pregnant with Hullda's curse, that never lack
Of murderers the Ynglingi race should mark ;
Tightly clasped, and intertwined, a strangling noose
Thrown o'er the broad oak's bough, beating the air
Gasped the dying drunkard. Far away her bark
Bore the Finnaland girl avenged. Agne's foul fate
Lives in his funeral stone. Egill from Nidarholm,
Egill who burst his bonds and boldly leaped
From Horva's high horse, and with vigorous arm
Cleaving the friendly wave, vile death escaped.
Vemund of Lofond, Mælar-Sion's gem,
Where Eystein shrieking died, whence Solve strode
From Jutaland's throne to Suithiod's higher throne.
And Agnar of Ræning where the base murderers
Ingialld-Illrada, and the infamous
Aasa-Illrada, over their drunken court-men
Burnt their own hall, of their own demon-fires
Indrawing horrible death. All, bold as staunch,
Each strong to bid the tide of battle pause
And break in soothing murmurs at his feet,
Bear forward their long shields, war-fence secure
Around their kingly leaders : now their plumes
Dance in the freshening breeze ; soon, slaked with blood,
To grace horror's ensanguined banquet. Sorcerers
In Lapland lore deep skilled the winds to chain,
In the storm to thunder, in the greedy depth

Of Moskœ-ström the skin-bound skiff to whirl,
To bare to the broad day Ægir's wave-roofed hall,
His caverns hoar to thread, where trees of gold
Bear fruits of amber; through the mute midnight air
In caps of darkness sailing, to discourse
With the raven far-foreseeing, or to snatch
The strong gyr-falcon from her rocky rest
And wheel her round the globe, 'ere that morning leap
Exulting from the wave. The fleet rein deer
Before their speed trembles; terrified the wolf
In the forest depth yells, and the huge arctic bear
Into cavernous darkness diving, rolling moans
When their snow-skates scatter the drift. With bounding flight
The heron scared, gathers the rushing air
Under her hollow wing, and the sky climbs
In precipitance of terror, when their bolts
Cleave through the hovering cloud, and drink her blood
Even at her extremest height. So sure their aim
Distance alone ensures safety. If anger's flash
Part from their burning eyes, instinctively
Stricks through her inmost depths Earth shuddering,
And every living being before their frown
Suffers in death: themselves invulnerable,
Clad in rein-deer cloaks unpierceable, they joy
In the wild battle cry. Dreaded and supplicated,
Equal to a veteran host, before the king
For large sums of red gold, his trustiest shield
March Swase, and Teit, and Flekke: and on either hand
Frode-Thormod and Thrand-Skalldspiller, superbly
With golden armlets graced, and golden gorgets

Clasping their necks ; with ivory hilted swords
Netted with gold, blue kirtles, scarlet cloaks
Broidered in gold, their far-resounding harps
Hold ready to strike ; that future time may repeat
The manly deeds of Guthrun. Fridleif tall,
And Heriod impious, and Kolson harsh,
Sweyn, daring, reckless, magnificent, profuse.
Hrothgar always resolute, and Frithowulf,
Fredulf, and Frelaf, Havard of Busenõe
Braving Elf's burthened wave, and portly Haurda
Of Stormaria, bearing her White Swan
Upon his banner. Large Brimilskior,
Kinsman to him who with fiery Amund fell ;
Both to one father by two mother's borne
And to each by the mother given the father's name.
Sigrod and Guthfred, Gudfrid, Scula dark,
All of Holsætta land, war-brethren bound,
Faithful and generous, munificent,
Of plunder fond as lavish ; each with his lance
Reckoning five hundred warriors, each a host,
Clash on their clanging shields. From Garderige
March Jarisleif, Visavald, and Valdemar,
Driven from Novogorod by Ruric, prince
Of the Waregi warlike. Of royal birth
Brook they not beneath his iron rule to wither
But for their prize seek kingdoms. Ola quits
Aldeigia's shoals, flees from her tempests fierce
The iron storm to tempt. Bolverk and Isrid,
Halti and Malfrid, of their princes proud
With them dare grapple death. From Adalsyssel wide,

Clad in loose linen vests of varied hue
And cloaks of ample depth, their lances long,
Huge crooked knives gracing each crimson belt,
And small shields slung by chains from their sturdy necks,
March Unimir of Odinsholm, and Klærk,
And Klerkon of Rogöe, the East and West.
Alfrim of Stein, where Yngvar's towering mound
Echoes the wild wave's chant; and Rettibur,
Valadir, Ostman, and thin Adalbrecht
Four scions of one stem, in anger fierce
Pour upon distant land that vengeful fire
Due alone to Estland. Valdabrecht's cold corpse,
In intense cold by magical art preserved,
Lay the month by law prescribed; carousing mirth,
And feasting to the full, time-honoured rites,
'Ere in the high-ascending flame his soul
Could seek everlasting joy: at every mile
Of ten outmeasured miles, his goodly stores
Abundant, as desperately earned at the sword's point,
Vestments, rich armour, coins, masses of gold,
In ten high heaps, each increasing with the course,
The tenth a towering bulk of trophied spears,
And mail, and helmets glittering, draped and decked
With garments of great price, and costliest furs
Gained from the bleak North, and skins from the burning South,
Floated o'er a blazing sea of gold, and bronze,
And ivory vessels more esteemed than gold;
Vessels for gods to drink from. Trained the steeds,
Of finest symmetry, and noblest blood,
Severely taught, and cherished tenderly,

Dearer than child or wife, an eager train
Of hard-riding horsemen started for each prize,
The fleetest gaining the highest. At utmost speed
Some treasure each bore off, all that was dropped
Fair prize to the pursuers who tracked them. Then spread wide
The unctuous flame, and high and furious :
And on the highest spire, his spirit upborne
Looked down rejoicing. Gorgeously magnificent
His fiery funeral car.—One dingy ship
Their steed of victory, furious the band
Spread over the Eysyssel wave, fortune their gale,
Their lode-star rapine and plunder. Blood-thirsty
Vendland, her pirates vomits. Ingemar, Burislaf
Kristrod and Siffken, Gurfidar of Dagöë,
Vigleik of Oësel, with their cruel crews,
Their spring-seed in the ground, the blue wave ploughed,
Bent upon summer-plunder. Of Runöë, Beirg,
His only home the good bold ship that dares
Storm and tempest, dancing on the boiling wave,
Joying in the yawning gulph, swiftly bounding up
The steep hills of the ocean ; boldly plucks
From the jaws of danger wealth. Rimhild, alike
From his birth a pirate, in his Rugenöë's
Bays intricate, tortuous, shallow, stores his boats :
But from low Hedensöë with skilful glance
Sweeps o'er the Ost-sea's heaving wilderness.
Woe to the merchant-mariner ! the fleet,
At his magician voice from the deep sprang,
Griped the despairing prey, and silently
Into their recesses vanished. Now he dares

Fortune in furious Hilda's glorious strife
With his determined crew. Valiant Valgant,
Of Gantska-Sandöe; Algaut, Thorgaut, Gaut,
All of Ey-gantland; Gautland where Ragnar gained
Thora, bright-blooming bride, where Wisbay holds
Suithiod's and far Novogorod's merchant wealth.
Erlend and Rærek, Olver and Gudrod, Karl,
He of Jordholm, and they of Lunden, rich
In vi-king plunder, Vesete of Bornholm fertile,
Amid her dangerous rocks serenely smiling
Upon the watery waste. Giermund of Drafn-fiord,
Aasmund of Fidöe-sund, where Glommen's flood,
Leaping her steep down cataract, thunders on
As a host fierce charging. Hagvande and Ottar Hönse,
Haavard of Laurvig, in the Louven's mouth,
Runolf of Vold, where Eystein's mound of death
Swells above the verdant plain. King Eystein fled
From Varna deeply laden, Varna's fields
Groaned, their fat kine were slaughtered: Skiold the king,
Skiold the warlock, saw but the distant sail
Each bark hull down.—Into his capacious cloak
Blowing, he waved it: the sweet-sleeping sea
Instantaneously raging, from on high poured
A torrent of living waters; on it drove.
The Jarl-isles tottered; Eystein from the helm
Was smitten dead: recovered from the depth
Here he reposes. Halvard, Eilif, Roald,
And Hadd the hard, of Byrdöe in Numedal,
Of degenerate kings ashamed, indignant waged
War against Earl Hrollaug: Hrollaug once their king

Slave to Harald now. Herlaug in coward fear
In his own grave mound buried himself alive.
Hrollaug, in royal state the king's-mound climbed,
And sitting as a king, threw himself down,
Dethroned himself, and in the Earl's lower seat
Entitled himself an Earl; then meanly bowed
Abject in homage. Haarfager in his belt
Hung the dishonoured sword, to his vile neck
Bound the revolting shield, made him his Earl
Where he had been a king; and so he lived
By his own bondmen despised.—Black cliffs, blue fiords,
Have poured down from their heights, and forth their depths,
Warriors indignant. Gida's contemptuous tongue
Nor-ryke has unpeopled: all her boldest sons
Have leaped into their sea-rocked realms, and live free men.
Iceland and Faröe, Orcnoë and Sudreyöe,
Wide open their sheltering arms. The Pirate-Kings
Swarm over every wave, upon every rock
Sit looking out. Vigeröe from her bold strand
Eyes the outer ocean, and with vigorous arm
Launches Rolf-Ganger on wide conquest bound;
And, numbers upon numbers, Earls and Kings,
Swell Guthrun's armament. Vain to enrol
Their names, their origin: the countless host,
Glittering in steel, with banners waving high,
Seek plunder, and a home.—Narrow and dark
Be it.—Throughout a dismal, howling night
Shutters and doors close-barred, crowding yet closer
Around the ingle-nook, scared cottagers
Hear the down-pouring rain, the driving sleet,

Cry "hark"! and enjoy their comfort:—Morning wakes
And in her cherub-eyes wild pleasure laughs
At the wilder sea of icicles; the sun
Glowing through diamond, ruby, or chrysoprase,
From cottage-eave, from tendril, branch, or stem,
Joys in the fairy vision, and stoops low
Over her impetuous steed. Chilled zephyr breathes.
A music of snapping, crashing, thundering sounds
Rolls, jars, tinkles, whispers: childish transport leaps,
And gray age tottering from the house-father's chair
Gazes with open mouth; so the clanking mail
Glitters through the frost-mist, so the glittering arms
Clang, crash, and roar; far on the wondering air
Echoing, pausing, re-echoing: so with shout,
And joy, and revelry, and laughter loud
Greedy camp-followers, crowding crowds on crowds
Cheer onward the long array:—the long array
Glowing and gleaming, as that stream of life
Which, rolling from the Northern-ocean, plenteously
The cormorant regales; lures carrion birds,
Who o'er this their shoal of food, croak, scream, and wheel
Foretasting putrid blood.—The sky grows dark.
Volumed on volumed terrors, threateningly
Volume over volume pour, until Nature throbs
With ominous perturbation; forests moan,
Hills tremble, rocks contract; cleaving, they roll
Sheer down into yawning depths; wide-yawning depths
Start up and with dark hollow eyes explore
Far the bare blasted heath, where shuddering gusts
Howl in mad agony. and shrieking, fleet

Tossing their hideous arms :—the elves crouch close,
Swart dwarfs into the stagnant tarn down plunge,
Black obscene reptiles, crawl from cavernous clefts,
And with broad clammy fingers tenaciously
Cling round the foul wizard's feet, who glowering
Steals through congenial goom.—Drops, heavy drops,
Thick, unctuous, fœtid, from the portentous clouds
Stain the afflicted moor and tremulous marsh,
Whence even the bittern flees. Putrescence,
Infection, pestilence, over every leaf
Spread their livid monotony ; the sickening,
Pale sun, woe-stricken, in unnatural eclipse
Shorne of her splendour, as a wandering ghost
Fleets through the hurrying scud ; alarmed her steeds
Into the mountainous vapours diving, hide
Day in the darkness of essential night :
Hræsvelger his wings flaps ; aroused, the dwarfs
Shifting their shoulders, burthened by the sky
Its numberless host of stars and wandering fires ;
Roar—At the uplifting of each potent voice
East, West, and North, and from the blazing South,
Swept from the Abyss until all the nether earth
Burns beneath the terrors of an unclouded heaven ;
Dense clouds and dark, as frowning midnight dark,
Dense as the heavy smoke of volcanic fires,
Thickly interwoven as sulphureous steams
Of necromantic cauldrons, seething hot
With their infernal rites, when the full moon
Labours in anguish, and vile midnight hags
Ride unholy errands ; roll on voluminous,

So thick, so vast, so dark, so intervolved,
As never cloud over hot Indra's realm
Rolled along in awful darkness, bearing sublime
A deluge on his wings. Brooding, the gloom
Consolidated into a structure vast,
Grows, arched from wall to wall with winding ways
Wherein chained thunders mutter, lightnings glance,
And howling tempests keep strict watch and ward ;
Ban-dogs of Gods : and this dark frowning pile
Magnificently huge, their stately hall :
Where, in exalted stature, though restrained
Lest Earth be overburthened, yet in bulk
Equal to a thousand giants ; throned they sit,
Each in exalted state, invisible,
But in appalling presence palpable.
So tempered the oppressive gloom, the air so still,
Breathing is terrible.—Alone the Twelve,
In their sacred vestments confident, dare pierce
The choking, the deadly mist : unharmed they pass
Following Ormstunger where all else had died,
Conducting the lordliest bull, and vessels bearing
Of water collected from the solar-shield,
Dew of earliest morning swept off by virgin hands,
Holy in itself used for holiest purposes.
Thrice, in mysterious wise, from East to West,
As Sunna whirls the car of shining Day,
Chanting in unison low and monotonous,
Of each dread god the name the attribute,
Steadily slow they move, encircling all.
They, as they march, sprinkle the huge gray stones,

And, three times thrice the inner circles, cleansed
By ablution, by smoke, by fire, from the defiling
Taint of the impure worship, they select
One as their temple ; pile consecrated wood,
Upon the altar broad with iron clamped,
Strike vestal fire from the mysterious stone
Wherein fire sleeps, cold yet with heat instinct,
Pure elemental heat ; on the curling hair
Between the budding horns, strew sacred salt,
Break consecrated cake, by the virgin hands
Of prophetesses made ; thrice pour on oil,
Water, and sparkling mead ; then with spread hands,
In tone unearthly, in reverent dignity,
Sacredly full of superhuman royalty,
As a king giving, as a priest imploring
Devoutly the Godar prays : “ Dread Gods ! to ye
Who over the Skioldungi watch, the holy race,
Race of holy lineage, godlike men, of gods
The venerated issue, who to thee
Bow down in worship ; All-Father ! Mighty Lord,
Of life present, of life passed through, whose word is fate :—
Nor less, O Mother of Gods ! venerable, sublime,
All-knowing as all-producing :—Glorious Thor,
First-born of All-Father’s strength ! Mighty the sire,
So mighty the dread son :—Throned above thrones,
Superior of all superior natures, hear !
Hear, and our prayers accept. To the dread worship
Of each, of all, we cleanse, we dedicate
To your honour this holy temple. Graciously
Bow down, yea stoop from your heaven of happiness

And in your grateful nostrils inhale the steam
Of purifying blood. This steer untamed,
Whose budding horns restraint have never known,
Offer we to ye, the divine, the everlasting,
All-Father! dread Mother! thrice-illustrious Son"!
Fall between the crescent horns, with vigorous arm
One blow Beard-Ornstunger strikes. Crashing the axe
Breaks bone, scatters reeking brain, and sharp the flint
Severs the gurgling throat: three cauldrons vast
Steam with the boiling blood, one gushing stream,
No hesitating trickle, presages
Acceptance and delight. Circling again,
Their laut-staves broad, sprinkle with holy blood
Within and without, the consecrated rocks.
Then blazes the sacrificial pile, and wide,
And high, and bright, and furious, and intense,
The hungry element ascending bears
Odours of flesh, of blood, of oil, of mead,
And the exulting gods inhale the steam.—
So purified the fane, the bands dispart
And in staid order, to the sound of harps,
Horns, and braying trumpets, proceed the awful gods
Pacing the sacred avenue, unseen
Their majestic, terrible, their sweeping strides,
Where none may dare to look. Prostrate on earth
Trembling the holy feet they hear, a sound
Rushing as of mighty waters, and adore.
Reverent, the Drottar upon a burnished throne
Rear each resplendent idol, and as in awe
Bow, with abased eyes unfit to bear

Such overpowering glory. Backward pacing,
Lowly bowing at each pace, hymns, praises, shouts,
And hallowed trumpets from their throats of gold,
Proclaim the completion of the sacred rite.—
Shuddering, the attendants duly range around
The fire-resisting altars the beasts, the birds,
The ale, the reeming mead. The cauldrons vast
Slung over the resinous piles, in the ghastly light
Glare as eyes of brazen fire, deepening
The mysterious, the unearthly gloom : nor day, nor night,
Or the day or night of Niflheim, where day and night
In contest confused contend.—With shaded eyes
Downcast in trembling dread, and silently
The worshippers glide in.—Sea-Kings, and Earls,
Each by his rugged throne of rock, apportioned
To dignity of rank : the fane, the precincts
Overflowingly full, and on the rampart-mound
All who other gods worship.—Frequent the heavy blows,
Swift the crooked curving knives, the gushing blood
Gurgling and steaming ; the priest's sonorous voice
In-toned, austere, unvaried, all else still,
Vibrate in every heart, and haggedly
Pale, their ashen cheeks deepen in intensity
Of pallor, as, rearing on high their powerful wands,
And poring into the entrails, palpitating
And struggling with giant death, ominous their eyes,
Yet glozing their hollow tongues, announce victory,
Wealth, honour. Suddenly the unctuous flame
Gleams, blazing as the central fire of Earth
Had burst from her teeming bowels ; insatiately

Sprinkling the fane, sprinkling o'er all the blood,
Labouring, the priests their reeking task fulfil,
Glow the erosive fires, the fuel sinks,
The ale, the mead, the purifying salt,
Feed the ebullient flames : bickering they blaze
To the roof-tree of high heaven. Distinct, each for
Each line, each speck, leap from the gloomiest depth
In Encomiums of fire, of lurid fire
Mingled with purple stains ; a fiery sea,
A fiery deluge, an abyss of fire,
As the whole world were fire, girdled in
By a heaven of ruddy fire. Intensely bright
Glittering the idols, distinctly amid all
The infuriate brightness, glow as molten gold.
Maddening the prayers, the vows, the ecstasies,
The very demon gods infected heave
And deem themselves as Gods. Ruddy the clouds
Roll back, and throned, shrined in fire-fretted halls,
Visible in their glory, the wild worshippers
See them in exalted grandeur, see them and fall
Prostrate adoring ; or in excited energy
Mix in ferocious combat, each striking down

Into illusive depths : dim-fading Day
Faintly renews his light, bewildering light
Stupifying, intoxicating, palsyng. Aroused
From the lethargic influence, the feast
They taste, they gnaw, they devour. Smoking the limbs
Of the high-pampered steed, steer, ram, or goat,
Pass through the incumbent crowd, each in his turn
Cutting through as a Vi-King, taking honestly
His share and not selecting, King or sea-boy,
All at such table equal : nor stays the mead,
Nor lags the foaming ale.—Before the altar
Guthrun exalted stands ; each radiant Earl
Upon his pillar stands ; each, the horn twines
Around his muscular arm, each audibly
Cries “ Health to Odin” ! and with continuous draught
The mighty cup drains dry, and Guthrun prays :
“ Dread God of slaughter ! God of victory !
God of the spear, the helm ! God of the sword ;
God of the ringed mail ! God of the shield !
God of the shout of battle ! bless our shields,
Our mail, our swords, our helms, our thirsty spears,
And give us victory : or if thou needest
Warriors thy hall to grace, with Victory
Send thy fair Valkyries to bear us home
To glorious Valhalla. Hear our prayer !
And hearing grant it.” “ Health, health to Odin” !
Rings round each flowing cup, and hard Earth rings
And trembles beneath their cheer, cheer to awaken
The spirits of the dead, and bid them rush
Into commingled fray. “ Health, health to Thor” !

“Health, health to Friga”! “Health to the immortal Gods”!
“Health to All-Father”! rise from lips, devout
As devoted to their cups. “Health, health to Skiold”!
“Health to Rolf Krake”! “Health to brave Sigurd Ring”!
“Health to Ragnar Lodbrog”! Loud and vehement
Rises every Health, upon the loosened tongue
Of every roaring votary.—The deafening
Howl when Elorrid the giant’s cauldron swung
Over his mighty shoulder, and wide strode
From crest to mountain crest, when hotly pursued
He heard a whole troop of giants threatening,
And, swiftly turning, with his rattling mace
Dashed in their skulls:—wild as ten hurricanes
Rose their cry to the startled heavens, and the stars
Hid their pale heads in fear:—so crashingly
Reverberating, deafening, pouring on,
In it’s red wrathful vengeance rises the shout
Of agonized revenge, revenge unsatisfied,
Thirsty, unquenchable: the roar of Nastrond’s
Interminable depth, were stillest silence
To such astounding shout. Had Romsdalshorn
Leaped from her rocky base, with all her woods
Into the terrified wave, more dead-blank pause
Had not succeeded; affrightedly they stand,
Palsied by the deafening outcry.—Haggard, way-worn,
Bruised, wounded, naked, as the yawning depth
Her victims had heaved into the upper air
To horrify all Earth; swollen with want,
Lurid, water-saturate, fainting yet resolute,
Before them stand Sigurd, Anlac, and Hialto,

Standing, yet for support trembling.—Amazement
And indefinable horror, hold back all hands
Lest they be intangible.—Guthrun alone
Repressing his quailing terror, grasps their arms,
Feels they are living men, and round them casts
His own habiliments. The kindly warmth,
The wreck of that sumptuous feast, the chafing hands,
The kindling exultation, as strong nature
Unclutches the gripe of death ; pour through their frames
Answering renovation : to their looks
Hialto replies ; “ O, that the greedy gulf
Had not rejected us ! O, that our spirits
Had from blue Ægir’s hall ascended to high
To glorious Valhalla ! O, that shame
Sat not upon our burning brows, and made
Confession of our survival ! Hubba is slain !
Hrafn !—Hrafn has been captured ” !—There are times
When the mightiest man is smitten down, and wails,
And weeps as a fragile girl, and fights in vain
Against the oppressing grief. In very shame
Of his own weakness, through the convulsed fingers
Stream down the scalding tears, and children wondering
Gaze on the fearful sight ;—so the whole host
Stand trembling, stand appalled. A father’s grave,
A mother’s agony, a sister’s last
Expiring look of affection, had never wrung
Trace of man-degrading weakness. Hubba lives,
Though Hubba’s corpse be dead ! Kings by fresh kings
Can be instantly replaced ; but—Hrafn—Hrafn—
Never can be replaced.—Hialto adds

“ Roaring the waves sing over his keel-shaped mound
And surges rock his rest. Without a sail,
Without an oar, without sustaining bread,
Without all cheering ale, whole days, whole nights
Drifting we drifted ; land but mocked our sight
And water mocked our thirst : wounded, worn out
By the furious contest, famine and exposure,
Had an easy conquest : one, and one, and one,
Each wishing himself that one ; dropped down and died,
Even gnawing their limbs for food : and blood, the blood
Even of the dying, sucked from their curdling veins,
Stayed yet our fleeting souls. Deliriously
We shrieked, we screamed for death. In the still calm,
That to our eyes reflected gasping men
Looking from the bottom of the ocean, suddenly
A mist, through which the blurred stars blazed, with hair
Streaming ; glaring on us fearfully hurried by.
A furious blast arose : all else was still ;
But we, but we impetuously were driven
From the extremest ocean, as a stone
Whirled from a sling :—we struck—the deep sea gaped
And swallowed us in its jaws. I know no more,
But that a torturing agony poured through,
And racked, and tore my frame ;—a struggling gasp,
And I could breathe ;—I saw a filmy light,—
It cleared ;—I saw the sky ;—I was alive.
I aided my companions ; life returned
To kiss their livid lips. With stumbling steps,
From the shoal we waded to a flooded coast,
Fed upon unsavoury roots and slimy sedge,

And, guided by the gods, heard mirthful sounds
Saw cloud-aspiring light.”—Impetuous streams
Pour from a burthened cloud, volumed the floods
Sweep through the hollow vale, a barrier
Pens up their fearful might, they heave, they swell,
They spread, they mount :—trembling throughout it’s depth,
It’s bulk, it’s connected strength, the giant wall
Yields to the giant pressure : onward rushing
Headlong the torrent smokes. So pent, their rage
Snapping all fetters, increasing in violence,
All former raving outraves ; ferociously
Howling their shields they gnaw, in their arms fix
As ravenous beasts their teeth, and leap, and stamp,
And yell, and shriek, and swear ; close up their ranks,
Level their lances, raise the battle cry,
Shaking Earth with their tramp.—Guthrun athwart
Holds a forbidding spear. In instant haste
Locking their broad shields, firmly his men-at-arms,
His Earls, his trusty friends, their course resist ;
And, blood had flowed ; but, leaping o’er the fence,
Naked, unhelmed, unarmed, Hialto cries
“ Hold ye, brave warriors” ! Guthrun’s pealing voice
Rings through the vast arena : Ormstunger
In his sacerdotal vestments, authoritatively
Keeps them in check : yet still indignantly,
They scowl, they set their teeth ;—“ Yes warriors,
Kinsmen and brethren ; Men of Denamearc,
Nor-ryke and Saxland, Estland, Gardarige,
Finnamearc and Lappmearc, Gautland, and every scour
Of every sea-laved coast ; ennobling, honourable,

And worthy of imperishable renown,
Aye to be praised, and had in glad remembrance,
To be inscribed upon Valhalla's walls,
And pointed to by Gods and god-like heroes,
As in your exalted honour ; is this proud,
This pleasurable anger ; anger that bears
The stamp of noblest nature. Yes,—revenge,
Revenge, revenge, never to be stayed revenge,
Shall be our cry ! The last of Ragnar's sons
Has fallen.—Cursed the land !—Last did I say ?
Ragnar's sons never die !—For one that rides
With the proud Valkyries, for one that feasts,
For one that drinks, out of base Saxon skulls
The beverage of gods ; ten thousand live
In your brave bosoms. All, all are noble sons,
Ragnar's heroic sons.—Ragnar's foul wounds
Bleed in your angry souls, Ragnar's death-song
Rings yet within your ears, Ragnar's shrill shout
Urges you on to battle : Yet shall ye chant
The clashing mass of swords and cloven helms,
Dye the raven's foot in blood, stain the wide sea,
Deluge the burning land, and bid the sky
Glow red with your revenge. Hrafn, Hrafn,
Has been polluted, has been by coward hands
Touched and dishonoured :—yet, yet shall daring Hrafn
Break from the ignoble bondage, soar on high,
Lead, drive us to revenge. On, on in your path,
Onward, but warily. Hubba no more
Of this earth ; Hubba's spirit must live again
In a successor worthy to lead on

His warriors, Odin's warriors :—Here assembled,
Here in our utmost strength, here in our temple,
Here before our gods, here, where the Gods themselves
In immortal glory looked down and were pleased
With their vast holocaust, your holocaust,
The offering of bold warriors to The Warrior,
The warrior-delighted god ; here hold we council,
Here, here elect a War-King skilled to guide
Huge armaments : no king, at home to sit
And of our bones and sinews to suck out
The substance, the blood, the marrow ; but a king
Who knows the battle-field, who loves the music
Of the spear and the whistling arrow, one who dares
Cry to his host, Come on" !—No murmured tones
Token displeasure :—clash to resounding clash
In measured time responds, 'till the broad sky
Vibrates. Each apt, in every duty trained,
War-men and free-men all, either to choose
Or to be chosen king ; arranged they form
One close, one perfect circle, with no end
Nor with beginning : all true Council-men,
All noble, and all equal.—The un-free without
And thralls,—(no base men here whose shoulders bear
Scars of reproachful wounds)—see how free-men
Freely elect a king ; and, having elected
That chosen king, obey more duteously
Than slaves bow down to the tyrant, who in his folly
As a lapsed heritage God's free-men claims.—
Breaking the silence, yet with modesty,
King Guthrun of East-Anglia, thus describes

His royalty of race. “ Adils of Suithiod,
Of the Ynglingi blood, successors direct
From Odin the Conqueror-God whom we see here
Our deliberations watching ; with his gallant
Fleet invaded Sæxna-land, plundered the hall
Of Geirthiof king, carried off cattle and slaves,
Among them Yrsa, beauteous, intelligent,
Accomplished, and of high birth manifestly,
Though habited as a thrall. Adils, forefather
Of Ingialld-Illrada dared not marry
A slave but with her own consent. He sued,
She favoured the lover’s suit, he married her,
Making the bond-woman Suithiod’s honoured Queen.—
Helge, the Son of Halfdan, of Odin’s lineage
Through the Skioldungi race, marauding there,
Carried off Yrsa.—Not knowing her as the child
Borne to him by Alof, old king Geirthiof’s Queen ;
He pressed his suit, and from the dungeon raised
The beautiful slave to be his wedded wife.
Rolf Krake the heroic, of this union born,
Became king of Leithra, and from him descended
Halfden the king of Juta-land who was
Basely, inhumanly, indefensibly,
Murdered by Gudrod king of Scania,
At Aasa’s instigation ; vile daughter she
Of Ingialld the treacherous, whose blood-stained throne
Stood upon the corpses of twelve ill-starred kings
All better than himself, all murdered treacherously
In the very bosom of peace.—My glorious ancestor
Ivar, the son of Halfdan, just war made

Upon Suithiod, the cruel murder to avenge
Of his honoured father. Ingialld and Aasa
Feasting at Rænig in Mælar-Sion, heard
The blood-croak of the raven, heard, and knew
That cry meant death. They feasted with their thegns,
Drank them all drunk, and in that drunken swill
Burnt their court-men, burnt themselves.—Ivar of right
Through Helge, was king of Denamearc; Ivar by right
Of conquest became king of Suithiod, and of all
The conquests of Ingialld; and through his ancestress
Yrsa, as well as by conquest, stood possessed
Of Sæxna-land realm of Geirthiof, and by right
Of conquest laid claim to the fifth of Anglia
Lying northward of Hrafnserie, from sea to sea.
Ragnar, the son of Sigurd, cruelly,
By an unheard of cruelty, was murdered
By the usurper Ella, who denied
Our right to the conquest of Ivar.—Ragnar's sons
Might or might not their inherent right have urged
To Anglia, the prize of Ivar their ancestor;
Other broad lands there are, and their good swords
Could have chosen kingdoms; but they had been abhorred,
Accursed, despised, had they not upon such crime
Hurled retribution, justly exterminating
These contemners of our race. Could Ragnar rest
Even in his throne of honour, even with gods
Equal, and equally honoured, had revenge
Slept upon his horrible grave, and feebly whined
Enough, enough of blood? Had not his sons
Ye to the task invoked, ye of yourselves

Dishonourable stain had cleansed, and held
Them in perpetual derision.—Blood has flowed,
The crime of one has upon thousands brought
Misery, pain and death.—I, Guthrun, son
Of Biorn, son of Ragnar, he who conquered
Largely in Valland, 'ere that Ragnar slew
The best blood of the land, and held at ransom
Paris the strong-hold of the Frankland king; by Inguar
The brother of Biorn, (who upon Edmund had avenged
The insult of his inhospitality
To Ragnar, when wrecked upon his shoaly coast,)
Was of East-Anglia constituted king.
While Hubba lived, he was our honoured king
As the last of Ragnar's sons; he being dead
I, Guthrun son of Biorn, son of Ragnar,
The son of Sigurd Ring, the son of Fafner
By Hiordisa, and thus, sister's son
Of Harald-Gulltand, son of Hrœrek, son
Of Audur daughter of Ivar-Vidfadme, king,
Aye rightful king of the fifth of Anglia;
Ask not that King-ryke only, but all other
The expiatory conquests subsequently
Made by the sons of Ragnar.—At your hands
Ask I the realms of all my ancestors.—
To give or to withhold is in your bosoms.
Given—I shall hold it as a sacred trust
For yourselves, my brother free-men, to rule justly:
Witholden—then foremost of your foremost rank
As a simple man-at-arms, war-fellow true,
Shoulder to shoulder will I march with ye

Whatever king may lead."—Ere the shields clash,
Odin from his airy hall impetuously
Leaps, and in Hrothulf's form seeking Ormstunger
Whispers the cunning priest. "Why Guthrun? friend,
He sits a King already. Wavering
As the wind wavers, popularity
He seeks, he lives upon; yet does he rest
His claim upon descent, however artfully
In seeming frankness, in meek modesty
He asks what he expects.—Our holy faith,
The faith of our forefathers, in such hands
May to the winds be given, if the winds blow
From point Self-Interest; and the authority,
Aye advantage of the priesthood, may be set
At nought, aye, or be destroyed. Under Oskytul,
If elected by your means, by your advice,
Our faith must be enlarged; no Christian dare
Whisper where his sword has sway." 'Ere Baard
Replies the fiend has vanished, and the priest
Full of the inspiration, feels the God
Turgid in every vein, and thus bespeaks
Attention: "That King Guthrun has established
His lineage none will question; In our Kings
We glory, and had rather elect a King
Of kingly or noble race, as one more bound
To honour his high descent by worthiest deeds,
Not shame his ancestors, who from their halls
Might look down, and might detest him. Odin's law,
The battle rule of our holy, renowned God
"To win or die"; has led King Guthrun on

And ever given him victory ; his sword
Never has let the hungry raven's brood
For lack of nourishment cry ; yet we have chiefs
His equals in ancient birth, who can trace up
Their ancestry to Balder, beauteous god,
And radiant, and beloved, and they in valour
Follow not his repute : at the least we have
Numbers to choose from ;—Even Oskytul,
Or Amund, sons of Jormuker and bright
Hlidisa, daughter of bold Sigurd Ring,
Father of Ragnar, their merits might advance
If you only deem them equal : I say not
They are unequal, or superior.
Divide then the conquered realms ; bid Guthrun hold
Ivar's conquest, with East Anglia : Mearcland give
To Oskytul, who it's rich banner won,
Token from Heaven that he the crown should wear ;
And our new conquest Wessex, give to Amund,
Who even now victoriously wider spreads
Our domination, and with our domination
Extends the ancient faith in our ancient Gods."
Who, for that he is a priest the priest mistrusts,
Careless or who or what the War-king be
So that he but wade in blood and give red gold,
Heriod arises : "We deliberate the choice
Of a leader, not distribute territory.
Who seeks mere gain is not the chief we seek,
But deem the better warrior the better king :
Pass we that by,—It is clear certainly
That Guthrun, claiming by priority,

If high descent any claim justify,
Should bear alike the sceptre and the sword.
He has them by lineage for that he has shown
On the male side, from Sigurd direct descent :
Oskytul or Amund can only alledge descent .
Through females, and the priest has not dared say
That claim on the weaker side can be sustained,
Except the male line have failed, or except the claimant
Be a coward, be witless, or worthless ; among the Skioldungi
Of Denemearc or Nor-ryke, certainly not
Among the Ynglingi. Shall we then set aside,
Or shall we maim of his due territory
Guthrun, whose foresight, whose skill, whose prowess, have
Conquered our most alert, most daring foe
The Lion of Wessex ? If Amund, if Oskytul
Kingdoms desire, let their desire hew out
Broad kingdoms for themselves. Set up a banner
Cry " Bretland for Oskytul " ! is there a blue sword
That would slumber in the sheath ?—For the cuckoo cry,
Our faith, our holy faith, our ancient faith ;
Gold and ambition, are true priestly faith
Whether of the White God, or the Crimson God :
Each does but seek the extension of his rule,
The rule of plunder, under the hollow pretence
Of honour to the Gods. Gain is their god,
Who for red gold sell cheating oracles.
Even their justice sells Judgement by the ounce,
Weighing soul or body in uneven scales,
Who pays best their first favourite. Nay Ormstunger !
Prate not of faith ; a Godar's rule of faith

Like a Drotlár's rule of Justice is his God,
His red, red, glittering God.—Heriod has said
That which he knows Ormstunger cannot gainsay.”
Murmurs loud and deep, glances fiercely threatening
Pass through the host ; and the unlicensed tongue
Elsewhere had been endangered, now secure
In the sanctity of Council, among free-men
Sacred as the Feasting-Hall among the Gods.
Advancing but one step, that step displaying
His advantageous height, his manly form,
His chief-like dignity ; the bracelets heavy
Ringing on his massive arm, Oskytul speaks
Deliberately, collectedly ; his tongue
Or rough, or smooth, or courteous, or abusive
As best his end promotes ; now is it soft
As maiden persuasiveness : “ Companions, friends,
Fellows in war, around the groaning board
Dear kinsmen and co-mates : upon descent
I no claim do advance ; courage, and skill,
And conduct in the field, and generosity
Before the hearth-fire, are the regal merits
Which we have to discuss : but yet have I
To learn that males are worthier in deeds
Of daring than are females, or that wisdom
Chooses between the sexes, giving her curd
To the one, and her whey to the other.
Who amongst all our regal ancestry
Excelled Freya, survivor of the holy Gods ?
Whose name is a title of honour to our mothers
And to our faithful wives ; a name our sisters

Our virgin lovers covet. If courage be
An honoured attribute, who excelled Skiaff
The maid of Finnlund? or Aasa
Who brooked no conqueror? or she, the daughter
Of Harald of Agder, who a weary year
Watched upon her father's victor-murderer,
And slew him, although her husband, although the father
Of the child of her own bowels, sacrificing
Rank for that dear revenge?—As to the law.—
Had Hiorvard not been burnt with his wife's sire
In Siløe, would he not have inherited
In right of Hildegunna the high throne
Of Sodermanna-land? Halfdan Svart married
Ragnhilda daughter of Harald, and when Harald,
Son of Halfdan and Ragnhilda, in his childhood
To Hela descended, did not Halfdan Svart
In Ragnhilda's right her father's king-ryke take?
Sigurd Hiort, gallant king of Ringerige, alone
With his good sword, of thirty Bersærker
Slew twelve, and the right hand of that mighty one
Haki the Bersærker, severed 'ere he fell.
Haki bore off Ragnhilda: did not he expect
By marrying the daughter's daughter of Harald Klak
Niece of beautiful Thyrni, Denemearca's ornament,
Wife of King Gormo; he would in her hand
Find the realm of Jutaland? when Halfdan-Svart
Married that blushing maid, and Haki slew
Himself in utter despair, did not he take
Ringerige by descent, Hadeland by a conqueror's
Indisputable title? If such right true right be,

For Harald-Haarfager, I speak before
Norsemen who know the law, have I no right
My royal descent to urge? Yet I waive all,—
I claim no right, I urge but my own merits,
My skill, and my good sword, a warrior's plea
Before brother warriors. Known are all my deeds
At Beverlac, at Yorvik. Did not this hand
Cleave through the back, spread the palpitating lungs,
And hang Ella, spread-eagle in his own hall-roof?
Say can the scorched lands of Lindesœ
Count up the towns, temples, or monasteries,
Where Logé stalked not in his majestic might?
Will Barden-œ dare say the summer sun
Was by her smoke not blotted? Who broke the strength
Of Earl Algar's frowning host? With the same sword
Who slew the Abbot of Crowland? who stood next
To Inguar, as his honoured war-son? who with Hubba
Raged throughout Medeshamstede? When the noseless nuns
Our love for their beauty balked, who the bitter jest
Paid with his crashing mace? who at the tree
Noted the arrows nearest to Eadmund's heart
When ye were the marksmen? For these glorious deeds
Am I other than an Earl? I envy not
The realm by Inguar given though all other conquests
Would be but niggard reward; but if ye deem
Gold bought my sword and paid it; perish gold"!
And from his arms, roll around the sacred floor
The bracelets of high rank, "perish the gold!
I stand a free-man here; here, here I plead
Honour, where gold was not.—Who slew the horsemen

When peace King Guthrun swore upon his bracelets,
And upon the Christian's rotten wood and bones?
Our keen swords cleft in twain such baby bonds,
The tether-strings of slaves.—Free are the Gods,
Nor by oath nor by hand-shake to the godless bound,
Who, chained by their tongues, rove wild in Jotunheim,
Rank cowards before their words; the scorn of Gods
Their make-game and their jest. Who Exanceaster
Held against that pack of wolves? Who at one dash
Cyppanhamme captured? Did not that good blow
Strike down the enemy, and give us all
The advantage we now hold; to move, to rest,
To trample down, to plunder at our will?
I ask ye all.—Ye all as free-men know
My counsel, and as warriors all partake
My imperishable renown. For your own honour
Elect him whom ye hold in honour. Hubba living,
I was his Man, his Earl; but, Hubba dead,
I am whatever ye make me.—In your hands
I place all confidence.”—Murmurs of distrust,
Murmurs of indignation, mingle with the clang,
The rattle of applause.—Anlac in haste
Steps forward from his rank, more noble half-clad
Than plumed and helmed knights: “A bolder chief,
A more dauntless warrior, a more matured king
Lived not than Hubba. Nothing in myself,
I but his opinion speak, before his own
Who acted what he has said. Brave Oskytul,
For he is wary, yet bold, yet resolute,
Travelling onward in his own set course,

Unheeding whom he crushes or hews down,
Stopping his ears to pity or remorse,
Boastful as he is skilful, and relentlessly
Tramping down whomsoe'er impedes his course ;
Ill has debated in council with himself,
Basely, aye basely—let him frown or rave,
Others can frown and rave and strike as hard :
Basely, before ye all, before all ye
Who know what truth is, to claim every deed
As his deed, as his counsel, as his daring ;
No one but Oskytul—His golden helm
Hovered over all, his far extending shield
Sheltered ye all ; the whole host concentrated
Was Oskytul, is Oskytul, ye but the jackalls,
And he the stalking lion. Shame that warrior
Should so overboast himself. Frankly, cheerfully,
I praise him at his worth. No share claim I
In his cunning, or in his slaughtering ; all are his :
Well he deserves them, worthily wear he them,
And worthily wear Guthrun all his honours
Many and various.—I would take them both
As equal, as strictly equal, equal in birth,
Equal in noblest deeds, each in himself
Containing the worth of all his ancestry.
If two so equal, so in all things meet,
Were offered for my selection, I should pause,
Question myself, and in my incertitude
Take counsel of other days.—I should refer
To our original leaders, Ragnar's sons :
And I should find that Inguar, he whose bold

Commanding genius, as on a mountain stood
Embracing a whole world, who poured the tide
Of slaughter as he listed, swooped as the eagle
And as an eagle slew ; he whose staunch valour,
Whose indomitable adherence never swerved
From his task of vengeance ; he whose foresight urged,
And whose ferocious onset hurried us along
As an arrow launched by Odin. I should find
That his deep insight of the souls of men,
Their motives and their ends, advisedly
Chose one to discharge the duties consequent
Upon a war of conquest, to press down
Ungovernable resistance, to restrain
The tyrant's oppressive hand ; and, finding that,
I should choose Ingvar's choice, and Hubba's choice,
The choice of both our kings.—If a War-king
Were our sole object, Guthrun, or Oskytul,
Either could hold the leash and slip the hounds
When the quarry should be in view ; but, in addition
To warlike energy, we need a King
Whose war or peace shall be the peace or war
Of the wisdom of the Gods. Ye have my counsel.”
Briefly speaks Kolson : “ I do not dispute
All that Anlac has advanced, yet is it strange
That Hubba, Hubba who of all men most resembled
In features, in form, in courage, in lust of blood
The dauntless Oskytul, should have selected
Guthrun as his worthiest choice. If it were so, it followed
The game of contraries.” Rough Hrothgar, through
The iron ring-fence forcing his strong bulk,

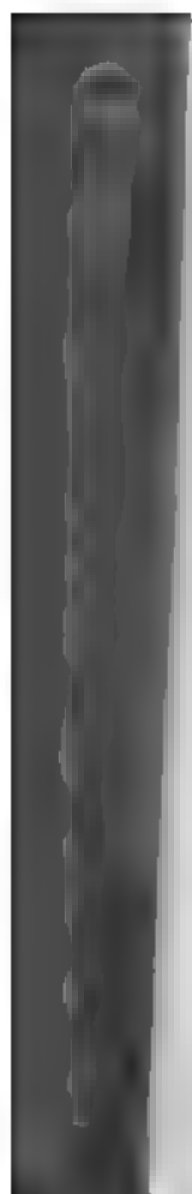
Abruptly speaks : “ Why thus debating stand
And not cut the question short ? Anlac has said
That both are equal, as brave, as wise, as great,
One sun as large as the other ;—Let them holm-gang
And decide it by their swords.” Silence sits still
Upon the airy hall, as counsel exhausted
Were brooding over result. Hialto gracefully
Advances, in his haste-formed garment wrapped :
“ Free-men and brother warriors ! I might urge
Some current of royal blood in these swollen veins,
Were royal blood with royal nature united
As certainly as the broad Sun, and Light
Her beauteous child.—The son of Harald-Klak
Might fairly urge his claim : I urge no claim,
I trust in my own good sword to carve me out
A kingdom or a grave ; and freely pledge
My honour and my right arm, whenever claimed
By the unsuccessful.—Ye have hitherto
Obeyed Guthrun as your chief, your faultless chief :
Ye cannot this gainsay ; why hesitate
To salute him as our King” ? Sonorously his lance
Clashes upon his shield :—a leading note,
It gathers, it gathers, a tumultuous roar
Of exhilarated multitudes ringing round,
Yet again ringing.—Ormstunger and Oskytul,
Gracing their disappointment, yield to the voice
Of their free-men fellows, and with ready hands
To the King’s-Pillar duteously Guthrun raise,
As the free choice of the host.—The free-man King,
To his brother free-men speaks : “ I thank ye well

Truly, and unreservedly, with thoughts
For utterance too warm. I have not boasted,
Nor have others boasted, although reminding you
At other times would be boasting:—here all tongues
Are free to advance all claims.—Claims are not boasting,
When decorously advanced, and, King or Earl,
Oskytul still is first of his own rank.
Only one can be first, and he that one
Reflects honour on all who follow. Evening
Curtains half the world in sleep; the drowsy-god
Nods in his car, the aged and the wounded,
Whose harms bite hard in the chill rheums of night,
Claim needful rest;—to morrow's glorying sun
Shall taste our Heirship-Ale, and, free of heart,
All ranks shall over flowing cups outpour
Their energetic hopes, their deeds unborn.
I cannot in the fulness of my heart
Speak with well-chosen words.—Ye have my thanks,
My sword, and my earnest service. Living to rule
As a king should rule, dishonour or disgrace
Shall never upon my grave-mound cry, here sleeps
The oppressor and the tyrant.”—Again the shout,
The cry, the clash ascend, re-echoing,
Echoing, and still re-echoing.—Weariedly
Over darkened Earth they march;—The darkened earth
Rests with them: Abyrig in her grandeur lone
Stands in uttermost desolation.—Time has written
Destruction upon her forehead:—Days and years,
And ages shall roll on:—The word has gone
Forth upon it's certain errand:—Yet awhile,

As that first race which in it's giant work
Of enterprising industry, upreared
The mighty lines continuous has been lost ;
As other races have lived, have died away,
And other races succeeded ; so shall these rude,
Unhewn, unpolished masses, unprofaned
By any human art, sink and decay,
Totter and be no more.—The peasant boy
Here shall on tiptoe steal, hence in terror flee
At night-fall.—Though alive with terrors now,
Children and infants shall, in future days,
Roll down the giant mound, or prank their hair
With Spring's early tribute : when the emerald meads
Vie in beauty with the heavens, youth shall sit
In enamoured happiness :—here age shall stretch
His stiffening limbs in the reviving sun,
And, garrulous of wonders, tell sad tales
Of waylaid wanderers and guilty ghosts ;
Or in the cinctured fane, a purer fane
Shall raise it's modest tower to joyous Heaven ;
And unscathed innocence, and repentant guilt
Here taste the bread of life, and here outpour
Their prayers of accepted gratitude, and sleep
Softly beneath the turf : to awaken gladly,
To spring up exultingly, to sing rejoicingly,
And, as in choral symphony, to rise
A glorious band by glorying angels led.

A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X .

BOOK THE ELEVENTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E E L E V E N T H .

Guthrun gives the Heirship-feast, and Alfred, who is visiting the Pagan Camp as a Minstrel, is invited to the King's Hall.

Sweet are thy balmy dews, soft soothing Sleep,
Beauteous thy silver dreams ; agile, tiny elves
Glancing across memory's curtain, o'er it's folds
Strewing Hope's fairy flowers, Fancy's gems,
Her diamond, her pearl.—Languid the worshippers,
Straggling confusedly, reeling with weariness,
Fall and sleep instantly, or as they fall,
Or stretched beneath their shields ; or, lagging home,
On the strewn floor, or on the pallet rude,
Half-stripped or completely clad, sink down and lock

Their senses in obliviousness ; or roll
Upon the bounding billows, woo fair brides,
Swill the round-reeling bowl, or gripe and tug
And yell themselves awake ; and sleep again
Down Odin's threshold to leap, or, hanging transfixed,
Feel ernes and ravens upon their shattered limbs,
Gorging themselves to the full.—Sate, the fiends
Sink down in lassitude, cloud upon cloud
Receiving each enormous bulk, over acres broad
Outspread and burthening.—All sleep, save he
Whose conscience knows no rest. He roams abroad
Foot-sore yet wandering ; now upon the wing,
Now leagues upon leagues outstriding, girdling
Earth's utmost length and breadth, over every zone
As a night-bird beating for game ; eye, ear, and scent,
Overstrained tormentingly.—Upon the edge
Of darkness and of light, he floats or prowls ;
Gloating over idolatry in every form,
Glorying in man's fond devices, and exciting
The abominable sin, the degrading sin
Hideously blasphemous, more hideous
Than the rude, the misshapen, the misclad, stocks and stones,
Into which mumming, juggling, crafty priests,
Claim to breathe spirit ; 'ere they speak, an image,
When they have spoken, a God.—Gods to be carven,
Gods to be bought and sold ; to nod, to wink,
To weep, to deliver oracles ; and priests
To lord it over God's heritage, to bind,
To hunt, the souls of men ; even as Gods
To sit in the throne of God, and call themselves

Holy and infallible : but the pure God,
The glorious, the righteous, the invisible,
The ineffable, the inscrutable, the holy,
Loathes, abhors, detests, turns from in indignation
The insulting blasphemy : idolatry
Of every name, of open, or specious form,
Revolting from, hating, accursing : and he will,
Burning in indignation, robed in blood,
Treading the wine-press of his righteous wrath,
Blot out the foul offence.—Woe to the priest !
Woe to the people ! who, infatuated
With their own sinful folly, praise, and bless,
The gods of wood, of stone, of brass, of clay,
Of paint, of jewellery, and in their fanes
Set up misleading symbols. God will judge,
Will root up, will exterminate, will hurl
Their idols with themselves, into that darkness
Where no light is, thick, choking, tangible,
Indissoluble, impenetrable. Idolators
Shall feel his vengeance : deceivers and deceived,
Bound in one bond of wrath, terrible wrath,
Wrath never to relax.—So has he threatened
So will he be avenged.—In such devices
Glowing with transport, Satan glorying
Stalks along and gathers heart : his empire wide
Knows not a setting sun ; and, Alfred crushed,
O'er the wide North that empire stands secure.—

Nor yet does Guthrun sleep, nor sleep his thegns,
Nor sleep his Saxon slaves.—Long, broad, and high,
Æthandum wondering sees a wondrous pile

Grow from her champaign broad, and rear it's roof
Keel-shaped, capacious, as that a dragon-ship
Had been reversed and suspended from the sky.
Even as heaven's blue vault, the floor it spans,
Glittering with golden fires. Wide, under foot
A marvellous pavement, wrought by men of old
With mysterious histories; the walls around,
Tapestries by Saxon dames for king's high halls
Pictured with deep legends; or, with deeds of old
In golden and silver tissue, from the bright lands
Kissed by blue Norva-sund, hangings of worth
Dazzle Astonishment. Exuberant Mirth
Leaps, for glee claps her hands, and bounteous Praise
Seeks words and finds them not. On the right hand
Rises, with scarlet draped, a kingly throne;
And on the left, scarcely less eminent,
The high-seat of the Marshal of the Hall.
Long seats, with passage ample for access
To broad strong tables, the utmost length extend,
And red the fire-hearth, sacred to the gods,
Stretches along the midst. A smoke-turret high,
And luffered-windows long, pour in the day,
Or the beating storm shut out. Ample and huge,
The hospitable doors all guests invite.
So perfect the structure, and so swiftly wrought,
Sunna stands still upon the cool morning's edge
Gazing at the illusion.—Fated not to last;
Sorrow and groans the firm foundation sap,
And wretchedness sways down the roof-tree. Night, terrified
Has heard the axes ring; Night, terrified

At the sword's point long lines of slaves has seen
Driven to labour, and ascending Day
Witnesses no remission. Night, terrified
Heard, saw, and would have fled.—The homestead spoiled,
The down wide swept, the garner and the field,
Clean made of life and food: the cattle-layer
Moaned to the sheep-folds bleat, naked Penury
Wept her despoiled home, and wandered wide
To perish, to be starved, that a King might drink
Her blood and eat her bowels, might parade
Gorgeously his luxuries, and lying tongues
Beslaver the regal robber.—On plies their task
For the oppressors merriment, and throngs
Laugh to derisive throngs, at scandal-tales
Of abbots and nuns forsworn, and gluttonous monks
Over flesh inhibited feasting; as roseate wines,
Liquids luxurious, long-stored, ripened ale,
Mead, cyder, pigment, morat, hydromel,
Travel from cellars deep, and long, and large,
Well filled, oft replenished. In the sun brightening
Vases, cups, chargers glow, and ample bowls,
Pixes, reliquaries with gems emblazed,
And candlesticks and altar-tables, gold,
Or silver decked with gold; and writhen horns,
And simple maple cups made rich with gold,
Tankards, capacious flagons, gaily glowing
Grieve griping avarice, whose deep-set eye
Grows to them. Lavishly, around displayed
Amid glittering trophied armour, gorgeous
Wall answers glorious wall, and tables gleam

In the hot, the ruddy flame. Between huge fires
Suspended, steeds, steers, red-stags, roe-deer, sheep,
Goats, savoury hogs, reek in the nostrils wide
Dilated, deep inhaling. Cauldrons vast
Seethe luscious eels, lampreys, or salmon red,
Sturgeon, or porpoise. Swans, geese, rich ducks,
And birds of every wing, wild or home bred,
Roasten or boilen, through the eager crowd
Edge hungry appetite. Winter's stored fruits
Fill woven baskets, kneaded cakes, and cheese,
Butter, and milk, and eggs, and savoury herbs,
And pungent and honied cakes, varied as profuse
Dispread the wanded ground. No Northman's spare
And stinted meal, flesh on alternate days,
But Saxon plenteousness ; provision so large
Ten armies had sufficed, to loathe and leave.
Yet not the feasting exceeding the pomp of war
Which halos the lengthened host, from Cyppanhamme
Climbing o'er rounded hills, traversing vales,
Threading the forest depths of Pewishamme,
Waving with banners, and in the southern sun
Flashing from leafy coverts vividly,
As in virgin gaiety. In volumed pride,
So rolled that serpent fierce, whose fiery glare
Daunting the iron warriors, held at check
Rome's boasted legions. So immense the train,
Had that enormous snake whose rock-ribbed length
Waves over the Northern downs, started into life
With all his burnished scales erect, and high
Arching his neck of terror ; Fear had not fled

Nor Wonder, in delighted fascination stood
So fixed.—Thick throng the long capacious hall
The King and his gallant peers. O'er the plain spread
The bands, and around their enormous, reeking feast
In locust swarms devour. Smoking, or steaming,
Or scarcely warm, down their capacious throats
The hecatombs of gluttony descend,
And swilled intemperance with thirsty eye
Measures as enormous draughts, and gulps them down,
Craving increasing craving.—Not so the chiefs,
They with restricted step the ample floor
Pace—Each his sitting takes, by Guthrun's care
For each guest appointed by the banner broad
Over each dependent. On the low foot-stool
Sits Guthrun, and on his right hand Oskytul,
And Ormstunger on his left, their high throne fill,
And in the seat of honour, before the King
Skalldspiller and Thormod, poet-warriors,
To eternize his renown, in deathless song
To embalm his mighty deeds. Pleasuring his guests,
His high state tempered with benignity,
His whole form radiant with unstudied grace,
Mild the blue lustrous eye, the downy cheek
Damasked with ruddy health, save that the beard
Parted and symmetrically curling speaks his manhood,
That face had been a woman's. The long hair
Glossy and twining, braided with golden thread
Speaks but of amorous dalliance, to be waved
Only by beauty's sigh, not in flaky wrath
To whistle in the blast of war. Scarlet, the cloak

Pendent from a jewelled clasp-ring, loosely folding
Droops on the sword hilt. The spirit of regality
Breathes in his whole demeanour, from his lips
Flows eloquent music, and attention hangs
On the sound enraptured. “Kings, Vi-Kings, Earls!
The tongue utters fluently when practised speech
Has words at her command, but the full heart
Wells out so lavishly her gratitude,
That utterance is overpowered. Ye have my thanks.
The God of Eloquence could not enhance
Their honesty their fervour. Long custom has,
And had not custom been, my thankfulness
Had originated custom; bound the King
To honour himself by honouring his friends
With tokens of superior worth. As I could not add
To your deserving, so little can I add
To external proof of merit. Where all bear
Honourable decoration, I must blush
At my starveling tribute. Ennobled in himself,
Earl Oskytul’s merit gold could not but mar:
Yet, I cannot refrain before ye all
To ask his acceptance of a beggar’s gift.
Cyppanhamme, Coshamme, with high Brædanford,
And ancient Bathanceaster, Brigstowe, Beorclöë,
Fethanleagh and Gleawanceaster may suffice
To yield his Court-men subsistence; Maildhelmsbyrig
Has wine has mead, all the rich plenteousness
Catered by skilful caterers for the taste;
And Breadine with her harts and roe-bucks fleet
Their steeds may exercise, and to these add

Instead of Inguar's Earl, I invest him here
With the Earldom of all Wessex, as a brother
Next to myself and dear. The sword I place
In his strong trusty belt, around his neck
The golden shield suspend, upon his head
Place the beaming helm, and in your audience
Of Wessex proclaim him Earl.—To Ormstunger
A King to a kingdom born, King, priest, and judge,
Godar, Drottar by descent, rich Medeshamestede,
With Witrington, and lovely Witlemere
I offer with all their rights.—Worthy Hialto
Will honour us all by acceptance of Rehale,
Stanforde, and the deep fat vales from Weoland's marge
Northward to Barwe.—Sigurd the strong, will take
Botolphstun upon the Witham, with all lands
From that river to the ocean, and all northward
To Bardenoe.—And Anlac, Anlac, whom all must love,
Well will defend Æscutun, Crowland, Spalling,
And the extent of Hoiland.—In honours rich,
Profusion itself could not that wealth increase,
But the dark sea respects ^{not} worth, and we should be
Niggards indeed not to weigh their sufferings
In the balance of deserving: each, the best suits
Of well appointed trophied armour, stripped
From warriors who had known and it's truth approved
Shall bear away from these walls.—Manors and towns
Of unknown wealth or extent are numberless,
Our knowledge well informed will further share them
Among ye noble chiefs; yet as an earnest
Of love and amity, to each I give

A massive golden bracelet, each will take
The dish or vase, of silver or red gold,
Before him upon the table.—To my war-sons
Ivar and Harald, these bright helms inlaid
With flaming gold, and ivory hilted swords.
To each of my Court-men, already amply stored
With helm and hauberk, a maple cup filled with coin
Each girded with carven gold.—Godwulf, brave Marshal
Of our hall as of the camp, severely has earned
This glowing suit of armour won from Mordalf
Marshal to that villain Ella, with the leg-rings
And beautiful armlets; and a gorget, twisted
From bars of gold, his sturdy neck will grace.
Rich though my thanks my gifts are ignoble,
But as my wealth is, I entreat you all
To ennoble them by acceptance.”—Lordly, the gifts
Of the wide-open hand, to the lordly feast
Add zest, add appetite, and the harp rings
To the King’s honour while the attendants load
The table with substantial, with tempting food,
And generous flagons the ample cups overflow.
Skaldspiller rising, on the sounding chords
Preludes, and pours unpremeditated song.
“Bold is the Lord of Bracelets! wide his hand
Scatters pure, bright, red gold: rings of sharp fire
Gleam upon warrior’s arms; keen the blue swords
From the brown scabbards leap; fiercely their flash
Shall dazzle the morning sun; deep deep the groans
Shall terrify Evening’s ear: Hilda’s glad sport
Shall pleasure the birds of heaven, prowling wolves

Shall welcome her whistling spear. The toad, the newt,
Shall lap the cold curdling blood. Hungry the flame
Curls round the shaven crowns. Biting the thongs
Cling round their streaming loins. Joyous the laugh
Rings in their shuddering ears. Who leads the van?
Guthrun in glittering mail. Who strikes the foe?
Guthrun in flashing helm. Who bears them down?
Guthrun with blazing shield. Whose are the shrieks?
Guthrun's fierce cleaving sword. Whose are the groans?
Guthrun's all-shattering arm. Whose are the shouts?
Guthrun's peal of victory. Whose is the spoil?
Guthrun's: and Guthrun gives with lordly hand.
Guthrun the generous! Guthrun the open hearted!
Guthrun, the Lord of Bracelets! loves the song,
Guthrun, the Lord of Honours! sows red gold.
Guthrun, the Lord of Victory! reaps rich praise."—
With the King's rings the flatterer's fingers gleam,
And wild applauses shake the resounding hall.—
Digestion waiting upon healthy appetite,
The sumptuous plenty sinks: replenished oft
By Harald and his compeers, sons of high kings,
Of earls, of warrior chiefs, and Ivar, leading
His band of cup-bearers, with courtesy
Sweetens reeming potent cups; by measured draughts
Emptied and quickly filled.—The meat dispatched,
Borne by four sturdy youths, with hands erect
Grasping each mighty ring, the Braga bowl
Moves as the sun moves round the freshened fire,
Sacred to the Gods and to hospitality,
Thrice circling the glowing hearth. With his full strength

Earl, thegn, and thrall, shall be : before us, abject
As abject before their priests, degradedly
Groveling below degradation ; for that they bound
Ragnar and stung him to death.—Our ancient faith,
Our faith by the gods established, here shall rule
Unquestioned, absolute. Stark ruin, in despair
Over every Christian hearth shall moan, shall brood,
And Odin shall be honoured, Odin be loved,
Odin shall be adored. Each, every God
Here shall have his holy temple ; every spring,
Rivulet, streamlet, river, hill and dale,
Forest and flood, and mountain kissing the clouds,
Shall to it's God revert : and this White God,
His mumming priests, his besotted votaries
For ever shall be expelled. Hear me, O Gods !
Gods of my great forefathers ! hear and grant
Success to my resolve. To ye I drink,
Health, honour, glad remembrance" ! From the brim
Over the strong-knit elbow, touching his lip
Rolls down the sparkling draught, poured steadily,
Swallowed unbreathingly.—The fire athwart
Re-filled, re-emptied, filled, drained, filled again,
Passing it re-passes, until every guest
Has honoured the kingly draught ; few rivalling,
Not one excelling their King.—Ormstunger leading,
All swear as the king swears, and right royally
Boisterous, the shout loud-echoing rings aloft,
And rings, rings yet again.—Unstinted now,
Maddening the cups swing round, and tongues unloosed
Riot, and confused confusion, in uproar

Bewilder each themselves. Wildly intermingled
The Babel-jangle, yet as peace it seems
Whispering to infant love, to the discordant
Rave of vociferation that without
Out-surges the strife of elements ; so loud,
So sharp, so painfully dissonant, the King
Dreads less some fearful feud, some blood-revenge
Between hostile tribes, has in the dissolute license
Burst bonds and stalked in horror.—Godmund swiftly
Sword and shield grasping, into the dusky red,
The smoky air out-passes, traversing
In haste the extended field ; leaping or stumbling
Over drunkards drunken, helpless, crying still
For ale, for largess.—Through a thickening crowd,
Aside the throng sweeping as an agile swimmer
Throws off the billowy ocean flood, he hears
A ghastly wretch, unclad, most sorely maimed,
Repeating an oft-told tale to eager ears
Amazed, and with terror smitten ; of defeat,
Of slaughter, of dismay ; of Amund torn
Into tatters by a demon : that all earth
Poured from deep pits terrific giants, armed
With century rooted oaks ; that Rimthussi
Enormous as mountains, hurried from the downs,
Starting out of mouldering grave-mounds ; that tall trees
Charged on the Pagan hosts, whirling their boughs
As a thresher whirls his flail ; that gods of fire
Glared through the forest deep ; that floods of fire
Gulped down the hissing rivers ; gaping fires
Champed up black legions, riders and horses whole,

Swallowed and lost ; that giants, dwarfs, enchanters,
Mounted on the howling storm rode them all down ;
That on every leaf of Sealwude hung a fiend,
A christian fiend, deformed, and villainous,
Every one crying “ Wulf ” ! that he alone
Wound out his way from a foul slimy marsh,
Could see, could hear, could breathe, but saw nor heard
Token nor sound of the terrific strife.
“ Villainous liar ” ! his indignant sword,
Cleaving the neck so thoroughly that the trunk
Stands yet upright, whilst the head flies gabbling
Over the crowd, Godmund impatiently cries :
“ And is it thus a madman’s witch-wife tale
Enslaves your faculties ? our Lappmearc men
Soon will such devilries defeat, and swords,
Keen as the vivid lightning, close debate
With chattering beldame tongues.” Paralysed they
Yield to the Earl Marshal. By authority
Silenced, though unconvinced, the tale spreads wide,
And the demon story yet the more horribly
In secret absorbs all hearers : the haunted wood
More terrific than ten thousand armies, each
The utmost strength of Anglia. Speedily
Passing, the Earl Marshal hears mirth, hears revelry ;
Such mirth, such revelry, as even his ears
Practised in warrior excess had never heard.—
Within an ample round of wondering, laughing,
Excited faces, red with boisterous glee,
More reddened by generous ale, a palfrey bears
A minstrel of slender form, of aspect goodly,

Graceful yet vigorous, well habited
In princely wise as favoured by ladies bright
Who listen in lordly halls : his tunic close
Broidered with a golden edge, his silken cloak
Of crimson, thrown loosely backward to display
The harp of his skillful art, now meekly borne
As for ease of his attendant : wrinkled his sleeves
And linen hose, gleam with small golden rings
As for use not ornament, and from his neck
An amulet hangs, fond token mayhap of love,
Eloquent as lover's looks : rich brown, his hair
Curbed by a silken snood, thick-clustering
Reaches his comely shoulders, spreading there
As glad to display it's beauty ; brilliant his eye
Dances in joyousness, as Vanity
Had sought admiration, and detected, droops
But to renew her glance : or fixed, it's fire
Shot forth poetic fervour : browned the cheek
Shows that it once was fair, now mantling
With summer's glowing tinge, or paler sinking
As consumed by the ardent spirit : flexibly
Eloquent the brows, the slightly parted beard,
Trimmed short adds richness to the parting lips,
And the well rounded chin. Godmund had sworn
Some brother of the King had sought the fray,
But that peace smiles in his look, and in his art
His whole soul seems concentered, and his light laugh
Mingles with the unfettered roar.—Of ponderous bulk,
A burly bully his two-handed sword
Has flourished over the glee-man, whose smart touch

Far and wide has whirled it, he still stupidly
Amid the jeering, scoffing merriment,
Gazing on the empty hand. Upon a shield
Agile the dancer spins his pointed sword
And to it's wavering tumbles ; in the air
Throws up three daggers sharp, and keeps them there
Whirling amid gilded balls ; or on hands and feet
Swift-circling wheels close to their retreating line,
Or on the hands alone, his feet aloft,
Featly walks round, or on his fingers hops
A bird of uncouthly gait ; 'till the mad crowd
Drunk, or half sober, hop, and roll, and sprawl,
And reeling ecstasy in riot roars.—
A chord the harper tones ; his vigilance
Has marked a higher auditor, and lightly,
As careless of what or how he sweeps their width,
But, on the awakening note, melodiously
Pours forth a stream of song : “ Bright bright the sun,
Bright is the heaving wave rippling beneath
Hiorvard's fleet of dragons. White the swelling sails,
Brilliant the golden prows ; the clear blue fiord
Kisses each swelling waist, the grating beach
Blazes beneath their keels. The King in his state
Invites the lordly heroes ; in his hall
Sit they at a royal feast ; the flowing bowls
Swim round the tables broad, and beauty's lip
Sweetens her hero's draught. Lovely the maid
High fills the silver cup ; she bends, she drinks
Success to the Sons of Ylfing, to Rolf Krake
And his glorious memory ! The vi-king brave

Empties that honied bowl, whence Love couched deep
Leaps to his generous heart. The maiden coy
Blushes to sit on his throne.—“ Stout vi-king men
Stoop not with women to drink, Men drink with men,
Women with women sip.”—“ That trembling hand
Snaps every mariner’s law.”—They sit, they drink,
They laugh, they talk, caress. Evening’s dark frown
Bid them to wholesome rest. Where, where is rest
When the heart with love is sick ? How can love quench
His fire in chilling rest ?—Sleep visits not
The pillow of princely Hiorvard : Sleep visits not
The pillow of Hildegunna. Languidly
Her eyes drink the morning light, and heavily
Thinks he of departing keels. Cleanly-cloven helms
Delight not the warrior’s heart. The maid he begs.
Glowing in gold, the mother leads her forth,
The nobles assent ; sly, beauteous, bright eyes glance,
Love dances round their feet, Love binds their hands,
Love holds high festival. Long long to love
Live Hiorvard the vi-king bold ! Long long to love
Live Hildegunna the peerless ” !—Melody
Bathing the halting ballad, through the ear
Enraptured seeks the heart, to the soul speaks
Of rude and warlike men. Each hero stalks
A reeling Hiorvard, every enticing mate
A staggering Hildegunna.—All delighted,
All chorussing the minstrel : Godmund pleased
Leads the harper to the hall. The palfrey trained,
The instructed glee-man, through the dizzy throng
Diffuse wondering pleasure ; laughing, shouting, singing,

All discipline forgotten, helplessly
Wherever they fall they sleep.—Readily
All yield way to the unknown harper, joyously
Longing his strain to hear. Such splendid bard
Had never trod Northman's floor; such princely gait
Speaks him of high-born kindred, and his eye,
Unquailed by the gorgeous glare, shews him well used
To traverse regal halls, to pour the lay,
To tread the graceful measure, or to bask
In the ardent gaze of beauty: King of song,
Companion meet for kings, even in awe
They gaze, and hold him Heaven's favourite,
Rich in the gift of gods. Honoured the harp
Had passed securely every bolted door,
Though behind it jealousy with mistrustful eye
Closely had scanned the bearer. Preceded by,
Heralded by the Marshal, doubly welcomed
By kings, and Earls, and knights, the silver tones
Through the hall vibrate, and as Odin tuneful
He discourses in Odin's song. "With bounteous hand
Give to the weary guest a welcome kind,
Warm thou his frozen knees, the hearth fire feed,
Shield him beneath your roof. Far have his feet
Travelled the mountain path, for food he craves,
With rain his garments drip. Offer him water,
Seat him at your plenteous board. Dark is the earth
His chilly hand that soils. Cheer him with glee,
Cheer him with honour, worthily please his soul;
The traveller cherished utters friendly words,
His song is the song of gratitude." War tried

And joying in the ferocious tempest, Guthrun oft
Has sat at ladies' feet, the song has waked,
In beauty's smile has lived: Fionia's girls
To his lay have listened, round, the slender waist
Has pressed in palpitation on his arm,
Eyes have wandered in delight; he strikes a harp
Apt the joyous song to lead. "The traveller
Who, rich in worth and in native dignity
In his own merit lives, gains happily
Rapturous applause, benign benevolence.
Wills are but wayward, fancies hazardous,
Trust not in others, on yourself rely;
So win your way to honour, and respect
Shall with delicious flowers strew your path."
The stranger bard rejoins: "But when the guest
At hazard seeks a host, the silent tongue,
The modest aspect, best his suit adorn.
Listening he sits, with searching eye observes,
Drinks in rich knowledge, and staid wisdom learns,
Artless and diffident where his elders speak."
Again the chord the skilful King obeys
Responding in volumed sounds: "Yet happy he,
Unburthened his shoulders whose instructed mind
Makes him a welcome guest, who with the stores
Of capacious understanding overpays
All hospitality. Through foreign lands,
O'er mountains bleak, o'er dark, o'er plashy moors
Wandering he hungers not; nor gold nor gems
Useful as wealth of soul, such wealth unbars
King's gates, in every noble's festive hall

Finds plenty, gives delight. Sir Minstrel ! sit,
Right welcome to our feasting." Oskytul,
Jealous that admiration her voice adds
To the King's welcoming, impatiently
'The beaming smile rebukes. " Odin, who had
All knowledge, has truly said ; Wisdom is wont
To sit with ingenuous modesty, not command
Imperiously in halls, and wise men know
That before the truly great and powerful
They are of little weight." The pride of worth
Glow's on the minstrel's cheek, the indignant heart
Throbs at the insult, words of wrathful fire
Leap to his lip, high deeds of hardihood
Flash in his glowing eye : Raphaël, in haste
Touches the harp, wakes the subduing note.
By prudence, memory recalled, replies
In Odin's treasured lore. " The traveller
Much wisdom needs beneath the sooty roof.
Man, his own master may his will pursue,
But he who transgresses the law of courtesy
Gathers to himself contempt, and sits despised
By the well instructed." Rebuked, Oskytul
From his own authority's teaching, gloomily
Over vexation broods, hating yet more
His forbearing punisher, nursing revenge,
Watching to indulge it. Generous the hall
Of hospitality, of peace ; that Hall
Even by the Gods held sacred, when Balder fell
Stricken dead through Loke's evil counsel, when dismay
In horror darkened Asaheim, curbs not

Nor pondering sits the minstrel, but resolves
The riddle as aptly as the priest propounds.
“I saw the dead wood bring forth living fire,
I saw the living fire dead wood devour.”
And, prompt as the reply, sharply Harold puts
His question, fearless that all human skill
The concealed import can evolve, but yet with awe
Regarding the stranger guest. “Now tell me, warlock,
Without a moment’s pause, what messenger
Speaks plainly yet has no tongue.” “Truly it were
Most difficult without a tongue to speak.
Lover’s eyes are eloquent, they have not tongues
And their liquid language yet may but deceive.
Beacon fires speak plainly, many tongues have they
Sharp, keen, and piercing, yet not one has speech,
The whole volume speaks, still but uncertainly.
Plain speaking with tonguelessness, unite but in
That messenger which has a tongueless mouth ;
The cloven arrow, whose mute eloquence
Is heard, is understood by king and thrall,
And never mistaken. Now is it my turn
At the merry Spae-wife game. No warlockry,
But the fair chance whate’er one can devise
Another can divine, has led me on
Untripped up in the sport : say gallant chief,
What bosom can be pierced by every eye
Yet every heart can trust” ? He thinks, he strives,
Ponders, then tries again ; twines it all ways,
Entangling the skein confused yet more and more.
Some deem him of Lapmearc lineage, by black art

Painted like Sæfrid, over whose lovely corpse
 Still fresh, still taintless, blooming as in life
 Wept Harald Fairlocks three revolving years;
 And but for Guthrun's presence might have tried
 The colour of his blood. Fairly confessing
 His skill at fault, laughing loudly Harald stamps
 At the slippery solution; "You will find
 Ere many steps through life your feet have trod,
 The deceit of some may breed mistrust of all;
 Trust them most warily, and never praise
 The clear ice until you have crossed it."—So beguiled
 Time bounds along merrily, and merrily
 Pass the unstinted cups: with unstinted cups
 Pours King Guthrun's harp; music or song,
 Or joyful tale, each to the Sea-Man's glee
 Contributing or enjoying. First the King
 Leads them the anthem of resounding song.
 "O'er my heart, pride of my joyous soul,
 Soundest of every toil, melodious harp!
 Lead me the gale delicious harmonies
 And mine own delight!—The ocean foam
 Flows round Sinfadner's keel, Hræsvelger's wing
 Flows the expanding sail: The King of Life
 Leads me across the waters: Joy and Love
 Lead me the burning brow, fierce expectation
 Lead me the streaming eye, and stern resolve
 Lead me, as adventure bound. Drear darkness scowled,
 None to stand or in blood, yet onward, onward
 None of us-flame onward leaped. High on a rock,
 None of us quail in his awe-full soul

Worshipped the lapsing light, on the stem leant
Of his sea-worn bark, and bade the listening sky
Echo the ocean song. The ocean song
Softly, sweetly rose and sank: "In silver light
I have glanced on the golden sand, my pearly lips
Soft the sea-maid's bosom kissing, wooingly,
In her green tresses have murmured, pouring love
Into her secret soul. Her Caves of Joy
Hold not the Poet's Mead"! The old, old man
Wept over Sunna's bed, on Mane turned
Dark his beseeching glance; Hrimfaxi's bit
Dropped dew, dew of inspiration. Song inspired,
Curved he the smooth birch sweeping gracefully,
Stretching, he tautened from strong oaken keys
The tail of the mighty stallion; sharp or grave,
Tempered he each to honied melody,
Swept o'er the sounding chords a master's hand,
And, revelling in the rounded harmony,
Sung of the silver spray and rocks of gold
Girdling the giant's home, where Gunnloda
Between her fragrant breasts had hidden the key
Of the diamond casket wherein Quaser's blood
Lay from the Gods concealed.—The King of Song
Leaped into his airy boat, by dolphin's borne
In antic gambols to the rich strain timed.—
Listens the giant maiden; listening,
Enraptured joy is born of melody.
Wildly her bosom heaves: subduing love
Revealing the secret; to the God she grants
Three draughts of the maddening mead. Wings, Eagle wings

Springing from his shoulders, with precipitate haste
 Flew him to the Altar of Gods.—Hence, Poesy
 To dwell in Music's temple, his gay delight
 Enriched her joyful dancing.—Round the hall
 Flowed my glorious harp!—I loved my harp
 Glad music of the soul!—Lo Ormstanger
 Gave in the Chorus of Ecstasy, whose voice
 Sweetness and melodious values the song.
 "They were the times, and his voice powerful
 When the mighty dead called up, to whom the wounds
 Gave up their unnumbered stores, who rode sublime
 Upon the thunder, seated upon the storm,
 When shrouded hour ocean's depth, whose volumed song
 Swept down the battle spears, blunted the swords
 Of heroes wrapped in blood; who from his friends
 Broke the galling manacles, who bound his foes,
 When in their proud necks trod, who bade them kneel
 And they knelt down in worship. Such the power
 Of him in his grandeur, such the power
 Of Music, with its gift! Balm of the Gods
 To slake mortal men, their souls to bind
 In better in the life, to call up
 And put living valours and fiery
 Flashes in the battle, wildly careering on
 The rich, full-tide of song; to stay the rage,
 To curb the impetuous steed, to soothe his pride
 To pay him as a palfrey. Music alone
 Knows the whole power of Music: Music unlocks
 The gripping hand of avarice, exalts
 The mean, the proud subdues. Softly music melts

Untutored churlishness, and pours around
Liberality of wealth. Music inflames
The passions into madness. Music whispers,
The fiends sink down and sleep. Gently Music pleads,
The sword of Justice pauses ; Music breathes,
Mercy in her pure loveliness awakes,
Blesses the criminal, and breaks his chains.
Music to Sorrow murmurs, bitter tears
Exhale into radiant smiles ; pale Misery,
Hunger, Disease, and petrified Despair,
And sordid Wretchedness, their woe forget.
Wonder,—and Music clothes them, feeds them, Health
Courses through their throbbing veins, and bids them leap
And dance with merriment. Glad Music, hail !
Hail, Goddess of the Soul ! Hail, hail, all hail !
Spirit of horror, of terror, of dismay,
Spirit of love, of peace, of joyousness.”
“ Good song-craft Ormstunger ! but he sings long
Who waits until your gate open” : Heriod shouts,
The ale talking in his tongue, “ though the dark widow
Hears whispering at her lattice.” Murmurings
Check the obstreperous vi-king, and the harp
Follows fair Sunna’s track from hand to hand,
Each singing, none excused. Esbern the brave,
The strong, the resolute, with tremulous voice
Wails through his song of sadness, moaning forth
Sorrow to drooping melody. “ I spurned,
Loathed, detested, peaceful sloth ; my bounding bark
Joyed in the hurrying storm, I roved the sea,
I swept the burning land, fierce Radiger

Fail howling at my feet. Breaking the fetters,
 The fetters of Ellisof, her melting eyes
 Bound me in fetters more infrangible.
 I cannot break my chains, those melting eyes
 Fair Ellisof averts: fair Ellisof
 Despises faithful love. Doubting my worth
 She looks coldly on my fame. I fought, I slew
 The chief of Beornaland. I brought her furs,
 For burning gold I brought. I brought her love.
 She despises, despises me, I ride the steed,
 I hurl the whistling lance, my snow-skates skim
 O'er mountain, throughout valley, the rein deer
 Flies from my deathful shafts, and the wild hawk
 Screams and climbs up the sky. I swim, I dive,
 The seal, the whale I slay. On my ship's rails,
 O'er the dripping oars I bound along,
 Yet she despises me. She bids me gather
 Honour and bright renown. How can I gain
 Fame to enhance my name! Moaning, my harp!
 Bear to the maid my love: tell my beloved
 The fervour of my love: tell her my heart
 Is burning with fond love: tell her my soul
 Is sick, is dying with love. Fill thy full tones
 With the sadness of my sorrow: plead for me.
 Tell her the war I brave: tell her my standard
 Is for her honour borne on gallantly,
 Is for her love displayed: tell her, that standard
 Shall wrap me when I fall. Fall!—I must fall
 If she still despises me.—Oh—if I fall
 Tell her my last sigh was a sigh of love.

Unconquerable love. Yet, if I fall,
Gladly I shall fall earning fame for her.
Joyously I shall die, and in the festive hall
Of heroes rejoicing, I will fill, will fill,
Will fill the gold-lipped skull, and with the ale
Mingling my constant love, will drink in hope
She despises me no longer. Go, my harp!
Never never forget my love.”—“Bear me that harp”:
Rough Hrothgar hoarsely cries: “Bear me that harp”:
Such whimpering will spoil her. Bear her here
That I may teach her seaman-songs, her stays
Need tautening for my stave. “Hark to the storm!
Hark to the billow! Hark to the gallant shout!
Hark to the rattling sail! Hark to the oar!
Plunging, and dripping, and plunging. Away, away!
To herry Kinlimma strand. Away, away!
For the Franc-man’s silver and gold. Away, away!
For swords, for arms, for steeds. Away, away!
Spread fire, pour reeking blood. Away, away!
Glut the erne, the raven, the wolf. Away, away!
For plunder, for laughing girls. Away, away!
To conquer or to die. Away, away!
The vi-king shouts, Away!—Away, Away”!
And every man leaps up and waves his arms
And shouts “Away, Away”!—Confusion roars,
Madly riots in confusion. The wild chords
Clash, jangle, growl in dissonance: artfully
Mingling in the clamour, maddening the fury
With her own ferocious tones, in her own tones
Binding and soothing her to gentleness,

To patience, to submission.—Wondering
At the magician power, they sit, they listen
To the minstrel's melody ; so skilful grooms
Give unmanaged steeds their head, urging them on
To outweary their own strength ; then, gently curbing,
Steadily their speed relax, and tame them down
To ambling playfulness.—“ In the pure grace
Of beauty, budding into womanhood,
Aslanga sat, silently contemplating
Gull-siken's rippling wavelet, sportively
Laving the pebbly strand of Spangareid ;
Where, forth of the golden harp, her infant feet
Landed from ocean's wave. Whence had she floated ?
Who was her princely father ? whose seared breast
Had to fate given her ? Was she earth-born
Or child of heavenly nymph ? Uncertainty
Spoke in her gushing tears, gushing the more
That in her ear the lamb's endearing bleat
Pleaded in gamesomeness ; and Kraka-becker
To her deep sighs murmured responsively.
Across the heaving wave a gallant king
Sped his far-piercing glance. The maiden saw
The black bark in her pride. Fluttering her heart
Unwonted sensations knew. The fountain depth
Cooled her hot burning cheek ; the snowy hands
Trembled amid the golden tresses, waving,
Wide sweeping the joyous ground. So beauteous she
The hungry mariners in terror fled
That visioned loveliness, and bore rebuke
In patience from their King. Amazed the King

Sent princes to beseech. Her virtue pure
Shrunk in it's dread of stain from seeming ill.
Siofna heard his pledge, and Lofna ratified
The oath in graven Runes, powerful to wither
The perjured lover's heart. Seeing, he wondered,
Wondering he passionately loved, and breathed
The ardour of his soul. "Most mighty Odin!
What sweet, what unexpected happiness
Where it if this pure, lovely shepperdess
My eager hand would accept, with me would plight
Vows of eternal truth." Amazed, ashamed,
Trembling and terrified, the maiden saw
Her imprudence and in soothing accents sung.
"Mighty Sea-King! misfortune and disgrace
My misery will avenge should the King forget
His pledge, his sacred oath. Return me home,
My sorrowing parents cheer." "Bright, beauteous maid,
All perfect paragon of loveliness,
Trust my firm faith, scorn not my ardent love.
Pledge of my truth, a vestment rich accept
Wrought by the hands of Thora my loved bride;
Loved but not loveliest: honoured, graced by you
Rich were such garbs. Dear as the blood of life,
Dearer than Thora's skill, than Thora's love,
Love though of early hopes, of youthful joys;
Even while life remain your courtesy
Will be to him whom the wide North gleefully
Hails as the chief of heroes, whose proud Hall
Would grow prouder in your beauty, you the pride,
Pleasure, and praise of all Fionia's maids."

Blushing, with downcast looks the maiden sung.
"How should a homely girl whose bleating flocks
Windier the sandy shore, whose poverty
Beneath a lowly roof itself conceals,
Whose clothing dark and coarse befits her best
Bear such magnificence? how should she dare
Parade in Queen Thora's garments? Thora who, rescued
When Ragnar's mighty arm the dragon smote
And slew ferocious Orm, sat on the throne
Of Royal Denamearc? No, no, oh no!
Such gifts I cannot take: and if I did
Soon the King's ardour would in scorn expire
Aslauga would be despised. Yet if you love
Fervently, and firmly, and devotedly;
If in truth you dearly love, Sail on your voyage,
Revel in conquest, gather high renown;
In constancy returning, great chiefs send
I will attend them, as your betrothed wife;
Then, in the Royal hall of Denamearc,
Before your gorgeous Court, on you bestow
My hand, my heart, my life. Your's they shall be,
They shall be yours for ever."—Bright the waves
Beneath the glowing keel blazed; the blue swords flashed
Biting through shattered helms; Hilda's shrill shout
Shrieked in the dead men's ears, reeking plunder weighted
Deep the capacious hull. In joy returned
To redeem his troth the hero, and to lead
Aslauga in her virgin loveliness,
To a throne, embellished less by gorgeous gold
Than by genius, by virtue, by honour. Fame shall long

Bear on her sounding wings their memory :
And Ragnar and Aslauga, while sweet song
Speaks to the generous heart in song shall live ;
And heroic chieftains, glorying in ancestry,
Proudly trace their lineage to the Poet-King.”
No deafening applause succeeds, yet pleasure beams
In every radiant smile.—Wont to despise
The outpouring of the heart, staid warriors
Look into far-gone time, and days recal
Of affectionate delight. The proud in strength
Hard gripe impatient swords. Youth’s ardent eye
Sees on a distant beach a glittering tear
Upon that fair one’s cheek, who with clasped hands
Wistfully gazes on the ocean, haply sighing
For him who sits entranced : and, deepening thoughts,
And mutterings of revenge, and scowling frowns
Darken the festive board.—Skalldspiller strives
The sounding chords to guide. He the King knew,
His exciting lay had heard ; on his right arm
Ragnar’s rich bracelet glows ; that right arm falls
Paralysed by emotion ; he cannot touch
The faltering harp to-night. It passes on.—
Silently sits the King, disturbed, and sad,
Admiring the Minstrel’s power, whose simple song
Breathing with love in it’s pure gentleness
So has condemned fierce war, enfuriate
With every demon passion. Hearing, he hears not
The boisterous, roaring crash, the joyous shout,
Or the tempered melodious note.—Still passes on
The wond’rous instrument to Eindrich’s hand.

Eindrich whom no one knows, but whose firm brow
Whose resolute bearing, whose relaxing mirth,
Whose spirit of joyousness, whose daring deeds
Speak him of noble blood, of Heaven's chiefs.
Honoured by war-worn kings, he rules supreme
A sun among waning stars, leading where his youth
Would seem to have bidden him follow. Surer aim,
And swifter blow, more adventurous energy
Fame spoke not of among heroes. Carelessly
The resounding chords he sweeps, and pours the song
Of conflict, renown, and victory : a song
Of heroes over their ale, a song of swords,
A song of crashing shields, a song of strife,
A song of fiery slaughter ; fiercely it sweeps
Athwart the clangorous string. The iron hail
Shrill whistles in the blast, thundering along
Vindictive legions tramp. Wildly the shriek,
The death-shriek wildly rises ; surging, the waves
Of battle hoarsely roar, confusedly howl,
And boom, and ravage ; and the horrible
The appalling scene of slaughter vividly
Glows in each flashing glance. " These are the tones
For sea-kings, vi-kings, heroes ; no quavering note
Trolled to at women's knees, no sighing strains
To damsels at the distaff, but the stern,
Strong, energetic chords, which the high gods
And resolute warriors fight to. Nine full days
And Wessex that blast shall hear.—Sing thou no more
Of melting, effeminate love.—Sing of harsh arms,
Of arms, of victories.—Heroic harp !

Snap every string if irresolute hand again
Thee with it's touch pollute."—Indignantly
Sitting, with heaving chest, and glowing eye,
And quivering lip ; flashing, his furtive looks
Stream as though seeking some conscious auditor.
The interdict so strong, manhood abashed
Fears to discourse of aught but fire, of blood,
Of plundering, of marauding, of the screams
Of virgins carried off, of mother's groans,
Of the gurgling gasp of fathers. Scarcely subsides
The enfuriate agitation, 'ere the harp
With the high-reeming cup, reach Oskytul,
Who passes them to the King : " The bard can sing,
It is his business to flatter kings
And feast with chieftains high ; garments and gold
Inspire imagination, and rich fancy
Spreads her wings for rich reward. Legends retailed
Denote but inferior skill : around the Hall,
The depicting handywork of woman's-craft
Teems with stories by us unknown. Can he unfold
The mysteries of yon hanging, where the trees
Are dancing around a singer with some strange
Ungainly kind of music" ?—Considerately
The King reduces the as ungainly speech
To terms of courtesy, and courteously
Bowing the minstrel to his generous host,
Scans the embroidered web and strikes the harp.
" No common grief, no common misery,
Flows from that wailing tongue ; those haggard eyes
Sink not for mortal woe : immortal agony

To follow her dear lord. "Fear not, nor doubt,
Nor stay, nor look behind: pass Hell's black gate
And she is your own for ever." So the King,
Vanquished by music, by sweet song subdued,
Sobbed his supreme decree. Hell ratified
The sentence in salt tears, and Orpheus,
Sounding his glowing song clomb speedily,
And swiftly trode her feet up to the edge,
The outermost edge of Hell. Faith could no longer
Restrain all-conquering love. He loved—he looked—
He looked—she had vanished.—Raving, still he raves,
Raves for Eurydice,—for ever lost,
Lost, lost,—Eurydice lost for ever." So amazedly
They listen to the song, as he had been
Orpheus, and they the savage howling beasts
Tamed by the enchantment.—Obdurate Oskytul
Alone of all the throng frowns furiously,
Hating the skill that checks his thirst for praise;
So furiously he hates, that utterance
Stumbles over every word: thick and confused,
Mingled, jumbled, unintelligible, they strive,
They struggle confounding each other. Minutes elapse
'Ere with strong effort some find out their way.
"Well may it be that a ready wit can frame
A tale garbled to the picture he has seen,
And dwelt upon hour by hour. Clear the hearth!
Beneath it some story glows, wrought out in stones
Of artful colouring. If he manifestly
Can reveal the concealed history of a man,
Some woman, and a hundred ravening swine,

Of grunting, wallowing, repulsive swine.
Spells, floating in golden bowls, degrading swill,
Destructively enticing.—Here they start up
In burnished, brazen armour. Here the King
Quits the gay witch-wife. Here upon the shore
Surrounded by her maids she grieving sits”—
Fractured the pavement bears not on it's face
The historic future. All gaze wondering
On the wise bard, as though they thought to see
The ravens upon his shoulders.—Baard Ormstunger
Deems him the God disguised, in pleasure bent
To honour the Heirship-Feast: so strange this skill
It almost sobers him. Even Oskytul
Now dreads the mysterious guest, and stays him not
From his further journey Northward.—Guthrun King
Admiring not amazed, that power respects
In which his God delights, in which excels:
Not deeming it superhuman, but conferred
By the gods in especial love. Loving the art
He loves it's votaries. Stately in dignity
Befitting his high rank, yet warm of heart,
Holds he the Farewell-Cup, tastes of the mead,
And with extended hands in Odin's words
To the stranger proffers it: “Know, when you have
A loved, a valued friend, your faithful feet
His threshold oft should cross; rough is the road
Overgrown with grass, with gorse, with prickly furze
Spread over and defaced, if traveller's feet
Long should the path forget.” “True, mighty King!
Yet trespass not so oft upon a friend

As that your heavy steps away should wear
The road to an open gate": the bard replies,
Pledges the Kingly cup, and statelily,
As he were Brage honouring the Gods,
Adds, "Health to all brave warriors"!—Guthrun yet
Warm with the regal ale and love of song,
His honoured guest delays. "Rings, chains, belts, swords,
Or garments of costliest value, speak to the bard
In the drear days of absence, and in halls
Tell chiefs he is held in honour. Warriors
Change arms and mingle blood; in nobler strife,
Strife of blest music and delightful song,
We have met and you have conquered: pleasure me
By interchange of harps; so, if we meet
In years long yet to come, when wasting age
May have worn out remembrance, shall each token
This joyous day recal. Sir Minstrel! take
My dear, my cherished harp, and when you fill
With resounding joy the strings, remember well
Once was it Guthrun's, and with kindly love
Look upon and bless the fragile bark which bore
Aslauga to Spangareid. Hesitate not.
Your birchen stem honoured by victory
Far outweighs the pure red gold."—"Let firmest friends
Pleasure each other interchangeably
By presents of arms and habits, those who give
And those who receive cement long friendship thus,
And in their hospitable halls will oft
Regale each other in gladness."—So the God
Taught his devoted worshippers, and the King

Does not dishonour the Eternal King.
And they part all well pleased, in honour part,
And, with his Glee-man, through the sleeping camp
The Minstrel wends his way.—But sleep not thus
The guests of that Heirship-Hall: the flowing cups
Pass round, incessantly pass; dishonoured they
Who sleep with senses clear. Roaring excess,
And stimulating riot, through the roof
Ringing, lull all into stupifying sleep:
Each on the table stretched, or on the floor,
Honours the King in kingly drunkenness.



A L F R E D
OF
W E S S E X .

BOOK THE TWELFTH.



A L F R E D

OF

W E S S E X .

B O O K T H E T W E L F T H .

The Christians meet at Ægbryhtastan, march to and encamp at Æcglea. The Fiends prepare to join the conflict, but are dispersed by Michæl.

That sinking of the heart which knows no hope
Had died into despair : oppression's cruel,
Unceasing, crushing tortures, had destroyed
Self-respect, self-confidence ; and in the dust
Defiled, yea trampled upon by nobles proud,
Despised, neglected by regal petulance,
The bone, the pith, the sinews of the land,
Had pined, had died, had rotted in misery.
Sunken the bold spirit of free-men, Freedom fled
The hearth of her fondest love ; fled but looked back

Unfeeling, brutal insult, are the brands
Of ignominious birth ; stark, brazen forgeries,
Of braggart, bullying baseness ; recognized
But to be scorned and hooted at.—That last,
Expiring spark of manhood, has been fanned
Into incipient life : the torturing lash,
The gibbet, the fiery furnace have awakened
The spirit they thought to crush, and persecution,
Religious persecution, fiend of all fiends
Most horribly persistent, hounded on
By fanatic superstition, bent to expunge
The Christian's holy faith, to re-enthroned
Loathsome idolatry, in her thick cloud
Of suffocating darkness to inwhelm
All Anglia, and in her to inwhelm all
The hope of the whole world, has but poured oil
Upon the flame of faith : each galling strife
Has but nerved resistance. Red the whirling scourge
Has clung round, even women's loins, and women's loins
Have poured forth warriors. Fiercely the bickering fire
Has with it's forked tongues licked up the blood
Of the idolatrous altars ; Odin's groves,
Thronged with suspended victims, have sent up
The fœtid, the reeking steam : the reeking steam
Of the foul cauldron, with it's repulsive food
Has tested the Christian's faith : the fervent faith
To Heaven has risen in hope ; hope re-assured
Has in her holy confidence implored,
And Heaven has heard her outpouring. Loyalty,
Tipping her torch with spiritual fire,

Soars from her transient swoon at Raphaël's touch,
And plies her sounding wings. No forest depth
Impervious to her strength, no howling moor
Untraverseable by her speed, no cavern dark
Elusive of her glance ; proudly she wings
Her impetuous, her daring flight. She calls, she cheers,
And patriotic ardour leaping up
Hard grasps his rusted lance, and mails his limbs
Ready for the imminent struggle. Wessex pants
And labours with her energetic impulse,
Watching intently, listening impatiently
For any battle-cry that shall call up
And head her on to the conflict.—Gloomily
Gathers the warping cloud, close in her womb
Folding the infant tempest. Mortal men
Quail before that ominous eye, whose lightest gleam
May rend the vaulted heaven, may crush all earth,
May end the human race. A flash—it rolls,
Booming, careering, bellowing : re-echoing
It leaps from crag to crag, ebullient
A torrent of blinding brightness. So the War-Arrow
Explodes the slumbering vengeance, so in torrents
The ardent, avenging warriors pour along,
All onward to Ægbryhtastan. Ytene
Rings through her dark recesses, backward looks,
Looks to the valorous defence of Natanleod
With admiring veneration ; yet, exulting
In the glorious triumph of Cerdic, proudly hopes
Many a noble Saxon King will wield
Her sceptre with happier fortune. Tweonambourne

Honoured in Afena's honour, dare not meet
Her mildly reproachful eye. She to the strife
Hastens her worthy sons. Ringwude deserts
Her fertile emerald meads ; Lentune her host,
With Bovreforde and Broceste, wont to cherish
Memories of high renown, to awake the lay
Of memorable deeds, where side by side
British and Saxon heroes calmly rest ;
And deem that spirits, wandering on the blast,
Listen, and mingle with the airy harp
Measures beyond human skill. Equal in deeds,
In spirit, and in honourable worth,
Speed they to the gathering. Antona answers
To Afena's exciting welcome ; Anderida
Shouts from her chases, holts, and vales, and downs :
Taking up the cry, the bleak, wild Northern heath
Dares much, dares nobly ; the wide central plain,
Her hollows deep, her rivers, streams, and founts,
Deep swell the vindictive peal. Wintanceaster
Her fame recals, recals her dignity,
When Cerdic sate within her walls enthroned ;
Her piety recals, when the idols foul
Thor, Odin, Friga, Tyr, and all their rites
Gloomy, impure, and blasphemous, down stricken
Were hurled to the toads and bats : her wealth recals,
Her prosperous guildships, her extended mart,
Her commerce with all lands ; recals in shame
The desolating scourge, the devastation,
The massacre, the outrage ; recals the shame
But to invigorate courage, but to swear

That shame shall be effaced. Penchett's, and Chute's,
And Savernake's huge oaks, in the winds wave,
Roar with their hundred arms. Rich Nadder joins
Her strength to beauteous Guilou, hurrying
To swell the force of Afena; Afena, rich
In loveliness as in honours, honourable
In glorious renown ere history
Wrote a recording page. Through deep, fat vales,
Through ravines beautiful, o'er far stretched downs,
Leap, bound, run, fly the war-arrows, none averse
All eager for the trysting. Hantunscire,
And Wiltonscire, join hands with Summursete,
Whose yeomen true swarm from Clevedune and the hills
Southward of Woden's dyke. The forest hoar
Of Mendip, her chasms cavernous, rugged clefts
Appalling, and the wide, the quaking marsh,
And fair Sabrina's shore, the Poulden's high,
The Quantock's bristling with beacons and old camps,
Exemoor the wild the waste, her frowning coast
Laughing to scorn the furious Channel-waves
Roaring and foaming in her caverns deep,
And beautiful as deep; the steepdown vale
Of lovely Udecombe, and Wifeliscombe
Surrounded by fair hills, and Goathurst, dark
With umbrageous forests ancient, Tone's out-spread
Fertile, luxuriant vale, bounded by high
Bleakdune, whose broad and dreary eye outstretches
Her glance from Sea to Sea, and scorns the thick,
Deep forest that to her side clings tremblingly,
Dreading the depth beneath: and Cerdre high

Whose fountain pure by an infant can be turned
Into The Maiden's urn, or sent to swell
The wide-bosomed ocean-wave : and every stream,
And rivulet, and river, moor, and marsh,
Speed to the gathering, and with strenuous voice
Cry out "To arms to arms" ! not numerous,
But every man as a giant strong with woes
Girded with resolution, every man
That murderous combatant on whose sole arm
Defends the fate of his Country. So they tryst
At proud Ægbryhta-stan, stone to be held
In reverence by all time, when manly deeds
Are spoken of, honoured, revered and loved.

Nor sleep, nor slumber, nor drowsy weariness,
Nor hunger, nor thirst, have visited Æthelingæg :
One all-absorbing sense has stayed all sense
Of natural sensation.—A deep pause
Has succeeded preparation, and anxiety
On tiptoe has stood listening day and night ;
For one loved footstep listening. Straining eyes,
Overtasking their extremest energies,
Dimmed with bewildering film have drooped their lids,
The ears have tried again, but all is still ;
So still, the silence seems painfully audible.
The sighing of a zephyr would relieve
The overwhelming stillness.—Eagerly,
With ears erect, with nostrils expanded wide,
The noble bloodhound questions every breeze,
Evidence discriminates, sifts fact from fact,
Fiction from fiction :—one deeply-inspired breath

And clang, and clash of arms, and crashing tones
From brazen trumpets bray ; and Bran's proud bark,
Short but decisive, bids old Sauer hush
His tremulous clamour. Obediently he stretches
At the jaded palfrey's feet, whom ready grooms
Wipe down, and chafe, and praise. Refreshing streams
Pour over their hands, their feet, and Alric leaps
As an exulting roebuck in his glee,
Ready for adventure again, ready again
To tumble his glee-man's dance, and whirl his balls,
And daggers in circuit skilful. Short repast
Substantial, nutritious, temperate, warlike feast
For exertion quickly re-nerves them. Alfred tells
That Guthrun drinks his liberal Heirship-Ale
Not within Cyppanhamme, nor has encamped
Within the ruinous City's crumbling walls,
But reared on the open land of Ethandum,
Where five fair streamlets the plain irrigate,
His superbly royal Hall, as wholly safe
From all hostility, yet still has shewn
A warrior's prudence even in his feasting,
By a high and well-paved road, and the huge bank
And depth of Woden's dyke defending him.
Lines to be held despite all human strength
By resolute men well armed, well disciplined ;
But mouldering now, sapped, rendered powerless
By gorged repletion, by swilled intemperance,
Abandoned to debauch, to all sense lost
Of warrior-like precaution, and every out-post
Stark mad with wassailing : that rapacity

Hatred has excited ; that, confirmed and deep
Muttered, the curse hangs on each peasant's lip ;
That hands which gave welcome when in recreant fear
Clench in revenge ; that tongues which had instantly
Told of Wulf's whereabouts, will now be mute
Though fifty Wulfs were in sight ; that, yet seven days,
This wild undisciplined riot shaken off
Their whole strength is to march, to slay, to burn,
To ruin, to exterminate."—"Ruin fall
On the infamous projectors"! Ethelnoth
Cries in his impatience. "Yes, ye dogs of hell,
Ruin, her strong arms burthened with revenge
Shall overwhelm, shall crush : much as we owe,
Aye every the utmost penny shall be paid.
King! we are curbed too long ; we are held in ;
We have waited your espial, what forbids
To hasten on our work"? Deliberately,
Slowly, yea solemnly the King replies
With words of import : "Yet but three nights since,
When deep sleep sat upon my wearied brow,
Wearied with care, fevered with anxiety,
Neotus my kinsman, he who weeping saw
My misdoing, my wilfulness, who yearningly
Besought me to repent or time would come
When all this destitution, this misery,
Should scourge me for my crimes, my abhorred crimes.
So he said sorrowing : Now, his visioned form
As it were invested with glory, spake to me
In the night vision ; he bade me to take cheer,
Bade me place in God mistrustless confidence,

He promised me Victory. In that assurance
I felt myself wholly secure, even in the den
Of those blood-seeking tigers. March we then!
Ethelswith, my purely, my only, my all-beloved;
In Providence trust thou, ennobled yet
Wessex shall be: her daughters, her sons shall be
Happy in honour, and in mutual trust
Rich beyond all earthly wealth. Heaven bless ye both
My dear, dear children! yes my pretty ones
Soon we shall meet again." His parting kiss
Dwells upon each ruby lip, even their mother must not
Steal away that grateful pledge. Vaulting upon Elf
In light, well appointed armour, quickly donned;
Aslauga's harp for shield and lance exchanged;
Heading his Earls and thegns, the warrior
Holds on his destined way, and gallantly,
Well ordered, well equipped, his Court-men stout
Pant for the day of daring. High over all
Streams the White-horse of Wessex. Hopes, glad hopes,
So warm they are certainties, and prayers, that glow
As with prophetic inspiration, high and wide
Float on the joyous winds, enveloping,
Shielding the righteous host, whose valorous arms
Pant to redeem their freedom.—Raphäel
His ivory wand uplifts. Swiftly Michaël
And his angelic band, with ported spears
And armour far effulgent, forward sweep
The balmy air invisibly. Zealous Abdiel
Resting upon Camalate his legion holds
Ready to close the rear.—At Aulre waits

And back returned rich in two goodly bands :
So does the disconsolate beggar who here crossed
Pedrida, in starving anguish, proudly march
Hence, heading a royal host.—Duke Ethelnoth,
Earls Merleswain, Leofric, and noble thegns,
Pledge me in this cup to Denulf; Wulf's worthy host,
Alfred's heart-filling friend. To Denulf, health!
And the glad peace of Heaven." Each lip the cup,
And every hand his hand, touches and feels
Honoured by the lowly swineherd.—Onward to Langport
Marches he, leaning on his trusty staff;
There, bids them all "God speed"! plain, homely phrase,
Pregnant with richest meaning.—Long his eyes
Strain after the devoted band, and, sight o'er-dazed,
Raising his foot-swollen dog, whose shaggy brows
Gleam with other than dew-drops, he paces slowly home.

Under Alric, the avenging Men of Summurtune
Add to the gathering; and Gefeltune,
Dilapidated Glastenbyrig, Tethiscine
Well out their streams of warriors; Aëcdune,
Sceoptune, and Creech, and Bruetune, loudly acclaiming
Welcome the strength of Mill-bourne and Camalate,
At Dinescove, under Harding marshalled. Peonna,
Leofric the less, obeying, old in fame,
Boiling with youthful blood, and ardently
Bent to uphold her centuries of renown,
Over wild boggy land, through narrow vale
Has preceded the array. Bidcombe and Mere,
From their aspiring eminence look down
To bless the adventurous heroes. Far their eyes

Seek, Northward seek the foe : the foe, supinely
Stretched around their feasting, hear not the wild shout,
The sonorous clang of arms, or the gladdening song
Of the rejoicing trumpets, now emerging
From those fair, those bright green hills whose fairy cups
The grateful verdure empearl, as that heaven had been
With all her gem-like host, and azure fields,
Varied in hue to embellish the glad earth.
Move the compacted phalanx, as that one soul
Actuated every limb.—In wave-worn caves
Scooped in the disbowelled Ebudöe, far piercing
And fascinatingly fantastic ; the gyr-falcon
Shoots, in her impetuous velocity
As a streaming torrent of falcons, to strike down
The culver, refuge seeking. At her rush,
Millions upon millions rising, sonorously
Beat on resounding pinions : the vast depth
Crashingly reverberates, as that earthquakes were
Wrenching giant rock from rock, shaking the isle
Through every gaping fissure ; rebellowing,
Re-thundering, re-roaring, until the boom
Over the wide Atlantic, scares the worlds
Beyond the setting sun : so the loud shout
Rolls through the empyrean, as the King
Bending, himself unhelms ; so the clash, the rattle,
Of lances, swords, and shields, and battle-axes,
Clang as ten thousand anvils, hammered upon
By Mulciber and his host. Again, again,
Yet, yet again it surges, 'ere the King
Can utter his struggling thanks. “ Friends, Countrymen !

Tongue cannot frame words that convey with them
Our enduring necessity, to bury deep
In utter oblivion every sad circumstance
Which unwittingly has estranged us. I deplore,
You, all of us deplore, and will efface
The memorials of misfortune, by such virtues
As will bind our fates more closely. Dreary months
Of misery, of woe, have taught severely
How needful each is to the other's weal ;
And I, in deep humiliation crave
Your forgiveness, beg your love.—God, in his mercy ;
God, the infinitely merciful, has taught
How I should myself mistrust : O ! that my suffering
Could have borne you harmless : gladly had my blood
For you been freely poured ; as for my safety
Your blood has been imperilled. Countrymen, Friends !
Brethren in hearts, in arms, war-brethren true,
Free, and un-free, and thrall ; for I rejoice
That all of every rank have firm hands set
To this great enterprize, this fixed resolve
Our Country to disenthral : firm union,
Of all national strength the soul : firm union,
Of every enterprise the heart, the spirit,
Binds all in it's golden fetters, linking all
In chains of resolute faith, of faith that scorns
The tyrant in his plenitude of pride,
On his pinnacle of power. If I desert you
May God desert me in my extremest need :
From me ye will not shrink. Firm, faithful hearts
High in your bosoms beat, and every eye

Burns in the certainty of glad success.
I thank you, as I love you, fervently :
And, may the God of Heaven our effort bless !
For it is righteous, holy, true, and good.”
The merry clash of arms, the joyous shout,
Pure pleasure dancing on each radiant brow,
Heroic ardour darting in each glance
As corruscating lightnings, bear assurance
Of resolute courage, of valour disciplined,
Of truth unquenchable.—With practised hands,
Obedient to his voice, the bound they trace,
Deep the trench dig, high the broad bank heap up
Guarding against surprise ; and, footmen stout
Stationed on every height, and horsemen fleet
Patrolling the hollow ground, and quick-eared scouts
Manning thick Southlea, keep as steady watch
As that Guthrun were not revelling. The rest
Sleep in due order, each with ready hand
Griped on his lance or sword.—Gray night serenely
Tempers her wandering winds, and Philomel
Pours out her heart-full song, as that Solitude
And she were sole companions. So they sleep.
The Guards of Heaven watching over them,
Contemplate His controlling Providence
Who, above all supreme, serenely guides
The courses of the stars, and in it's track
Keeps the mote in the sun-beam, and his high praise sing
Whose love is beyond all praise, beyond all love.
“Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Life !
Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Death !

Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Hosts !
Lord God of all, that was, and is, and shall be,
The only true, the only great, the only
The dreadful Lord God Almighty ! Be with us,
Cheer us, sustain us, shield us. Highest of creatures
And nearest to thyself, we yet are weak,
Feeble, and helpless : though as thy ministers,
Powerful, courageous, invincible. Be with us
So as we trust in thy wide Providence :
Guard us from harm, our strength invigorate,
And, joyous in thy service, bid us live
In gratitude, in reverence, in love ;
Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Life !
Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Death !
Gloriously holy art thou, Lord of Hosts !
Glorious Lord God of Mercy ! hear our prayer,
And comfort us, and bless us.”—Noiseless the owl
Her downy wing has closed, the weasel sharp
From the hen’s roost has slunk, lone the wolf’s howl
No longer makes darkness terrible : the blink
Of earliest dawn upon the Eastern hills,
Wakening Earth’s choristers that Heaven may hear
Their cheerful gratitude, the host calls up,
And, the spare meal partaken little shrinks
Their store for forty days.—In three main bands,
The King with his stout Court-men in advance,
Take up their Northern march, with wary steps,
And eyes every trace that con ; hunter’s keen eyes,
Skilled to detect the slot, to note the soiling,
Entries, and blemishes, and to recover

The hart when the hound is foiled.—Pure Deverell
Looks in her love upon the Patriot host,
Waving on high her sedge-girt diadem
And cheering them on to Southlea, whose broad shades
To the marsh commend them wherein Amund sleeps
With all his chosen. Gloomily sleep they on !
No funeral mound shall honour them, no stone
Tell to the passing gale the memory
Of their atrocious deeds. Obliviousness
Enshroud them in her thick night-woven pall
And even Horror forget them ! Gentle Biss
Winds through the deep rich valley, carolling
To her Paradise of beauty as the host
Taste of her silver urn, taste for relief
From the oppressive sorrow of the scene
Eastward toward Bedgwin stretching, once so fair,
So stately, so delightful ; now one waste
Of extremest desolation, parched up, seared,
Studded with blackened trunks, drear monuments
Weeping over ruinous once-happy homes,
Where lovely contentment dwelt, and innocence
Danced with her primrose wreaths, and cowslip balls
Rolled over dew-sprinkled meads. Drooping and sad,
Now stark misery wanders where light pleasure leaped,
Seeking memorial relics, she the sole
Relic of all that was lovely. Terrible war !
What horrible crimes float over thy banner-folds,
Stream from thy nodding plume. Repulsive so
Thy countenance, thy form, that pageantry
And glitter must conceal thee, as the foul sin

Paints over the hollow cheek that speaks her shame.
Yet not lament they long : up, up in arms
Stout Westanwude, bleak Trowle, leap over Biss
Swelling the long array. Nor Æscetun
Slinks from the glorious strife ; sharp suffering
Has broken her pagan bonds ; her tyrants proud,
Strong to oppress but powerless to defend,
Taught her Wulf's sword was far more pitiful
Than Guthrun's tender love. Late, not too late,
She from her degradation rises, clasps
Eagerly the war-arrow to her panting heart
And is once more a Saxon.—Warily
Thrown forward, active horsemen and fleet youth,
Have ring-walked the country, nor detected trace
Of recent footprints. Unburied skeletons,
Ruins of cottages, scared, wandering dogs
Starving by their murdered masters, yet define
The circuit of the foe. Abona reached
Where Tene unites with her fair servitors
To pour in their brimming urns, the maiden stream
Swells glowing with her pride, the rush-crowned banks
Scarcely containing her waves. No axes ring
Crashing through alder-stems, no sinking heart
Grieves for the tree on which affection traced
The inseparable knot ; their bucklers light
Skilfully compacted, bridge the rivulet,
And Æcglea kisses her true monarch's foot.
Æcglea by Nature made a camp secure,
Rising, and clad with wood, close girdled in
Save at one point by streamlets, and Abona's

Hehstan the fisherman, and Beornhelm,
Duding, and Ælfhæg, Wulfsic surnamed the pale
Of Meratune, conscious of the reproachful death
Of Cynewulf, murdered by Cyneheard in the lap
Of inconstant dalliance. Heardric of Ceolsõe
Skilled from the ocean waters to obtain
All-purifying salt, strong Beagwulf
Famed for bold hunter-craft, of Prifetasfleod
Stained with the blood of Sigebryht, who fell
First from his throne, and then beneath the blade
Of the fierce swine-herd, who against the king
Raised the red knife of revenge for Cumbra's death.
Earl Cumbra, who in honest patriotism
Stating grievance and complaint, was foully slain.
With Athelælf of Meonwara, these bold chiefs
Lead the strength of Hantun; all the war-strung men
Whom misery and terror had not driven
For safety over sea.—Woe to the land!
Woe to the wretched land, whose children wander
Seeking subsistence, safety, and a grave;
The last, the only boon their native plains
Can or will offer: only offering that
To conceal an offensive corpse.—A Royal-thegn
Hundberht of Silcæster, Silcæster whose eye
Stretched in her wantonness of security
Over a groaning land, when iron Rome
Here ruled in splendour, here in temples proud
To senseless idols bent, and, robed in state,
Scorned in her gorgeous Amphitheatre
The shrieks of Christian victims, with their groans

Her shameless luxury pampering. An Idolater
Overthrew the city wherein Idolatry
Raised her insulting head : thorns now and thistles
Flourish amid ruined walls, reptiles obscene
Slimily crawl the streets, and desolation
Broods over crumbling palaces : the chief
Loved by his brave compatriots, leads a force
Of spearmen, of skilful bowmen, not unapt
The lance to dart, to wield the bill-hook broad ;
Athletic foresters, and heath-men bold :
Wary that brown hart, fierce that full-tusked boar
Who in disdain held them. Ethelbert, Werburg,
Thurkill the white, and Sigefrid, and Wealdhelm,
Beonheah and Eadmond, Athelsin and Ælfgar,
Eadwerd of Basengas where Ethered
Lost the honours of Æscedune ; and Sigerid
And Sigeric, both of Lichfeld strewn with graves
Of warriors to fame unknown ; with Æthelheah,
Whose stately swans sail the paternal lake
Whence Alne her soft, pellucid waters, pours
Into her sister's urn ; both proud to lave
Clausentum, thy towers, where the bittern hoarse,
Bird of the gloom, the fen, the sedgy pool,
Laughs his uncouth, savage love-note, bellowing
To serenade his mate, whose enraptured ears
Drink in that melting symphony which scares
Man from the reeking morass, warning him
Of gnawing rheums, and agues. Stout and bold,
Such children Hantun glories in, and deems
Her brave King in safe keeping.—Wiltescire,

Exulting not less in her intrepid sons,
And burning with indignation that her soil
Yet is polluted, sends with Leofric,
Stout, sturdy, stalwart Earl ; and his true thegns,
All Chute, all Savernake, nor holds she back
Penchett's rough foresters. Hibard leads them on
With Wulfsige chief of bowmen, furious Bardic,
And hardy, enduring Ulnad. Marks and Durin,
And Alfin, the house-thegns warm welcoming,
Join their old comrades, recalling venturous deeds
Of bold companionship. Of Collenbourne,
Named from the stream whose hasteful waters shrink
From the hot gaze of the sun, yet gambolling
And whirling around her rushes now trips on
In spring-tide merriment, and leaps elate
Into the arms of Guilou and Afena,
Her fair, her lovely sisters ; she, the least
Elated in her beauty, bashfully
Hides in their flowing tresses, and empearls
Their royal coronets with humbler worth,
With virtues more peaceful. White Ægbryhtastan
Of her distinguished honour justly proud,
With her stout Ælfhelm, Aelmer and Osbern,
Sabert and Rainer, and Eadwin surnamed the white,
Marches under Eadwulf, born in Penchett wild
A Royal-thegn, war-tried and high renowned.
Far-visible Brædanford, from her abrupt
Precipitous ascent, under Æthelwold,
Wulfheab, and Ulstan, and Leofric, swell his train.
Nor are the Royal thegns, Leofwin and Weobba,

That tribute of glad tribute which the brave
To the excellent award. Earl Merleswain,
Lord of Bruggewalter, worthy to succeed
Hun the first Earl of Summersete's broad lands,
Her vales, her soaring hills. Kenwulf the pious,
The just, the peaceful, with an able hand
Ruled Mercia, ruled her conquests, at bay held
Egbert the ambitious, who from Charlemagne
Learnt the rough art of warfare, and in himself
Studied the wary art of government ;
Checking himself in his wisdom, and restraining
Ambitious craving, but the more certainly
To grasp the coveted object. Kenwulf dead,
Desire of dominion whispered Windreda,
Urged her to deeds of blood : a brother's blood
Uttering curses athwart her pathway flowed,
Barred her from the coveted throne : but Ceolwulf
Stripped of the diadem by Beornwulf rich,
Though not of royal lineage ; fled the land ;
And the usurper, in his pride of heart
And self-sufficiency, against Egbert poured
The furious waves of warfare : Ellandune
Grieved for the death of Hun, thrice valorous,
Though Wessex was victorious. Guilou's waters
Saw Beornwulf smitten down : fleeing, he fled
But to be smitten again, to fall, to end
His usurpation. Earnulf worthily
Wielded the sword of power, next to Hun
But not inferior ; and Merleswain
Lags not behind them in Fame's glorious path.

Hundwulf and Beorthelm, victorious Sigebeorht,
And the stout thegns who under Ethelnoth
Held the passes of broad Sealwude, tried and true,
Wait upon duty's steps: and mirthful Alric
And his devoted compeers whose righteous wrath
Smote the brutal pagan, and the pagan's friend;
Polish the ashen spear, fresh string the bow,
Re-barb the whistling shaft. Eager to obtain
Honour in the patriot's field, eager to prove
Their abounding ardour, Merleswain's footsteps follow
Wybba of Bruggewalter, Osric the tall
Of Goathurst's deepening shade, and Gaherst lord
Of Enmore's loveliness; of Tantune fair,
Whence the gallant Queen of Ina, sheathed in arms,
Drove Ealdbryht rebellious, and totally destroyed
His castellated strength; Aldulf the stout,
And Ælfric the courageous, hold the honour
Of their native township on their broad sword's edge,
Meaning to keep it bright. Of Wellentune,
And Wifeliscombe girded in with fertile hills,
Wihtrud and Harpen march, all confident,
And Ica stays not her warriors. Bathanceaster
Sends forth her worthiest. Duke Ethelnoth
Rejoices in her promptitude, Dirling, Bardulf,
Hakensen, Atheling, and Wilöe small
Yet bearing a valiant heart wherever fame
Wherever vengeance call, each with his band
Pant for the morrow's dawning.—Steadily
Valuing war's desperate chances, in the hands
Of an overruling Providence have they placed

That strongly assured hope, that confidence,
Which unpresumingly trusts His righteous time
Of merciful deliverance has arrived ;
That they are His thrice-honoured instruments,
And under His guidance fight, for their homes fight,
Fight for that liberty which renders man
A worthy servant of his Maker ; worshipping,
And with a true heart loving Him, who loves
That free-man's honest soul which follows not
Fondly devised fables, trusts not in man
The fallible, the sinful, but adores
Only the Only God, the just, the true,
The merciful, the holy. Of such faith
Sang their bold leader, in such assured faith
Treads he the righteous path and falters not,
For it is the path of duty. Guarding him,
A sturdy shield-fence, closely interlocked
Proof against mortal arm, stout Athulf stands
With noble Ethelfrith, whose skilful rule
Is owned in the festive hall ; who lightly treads
The courtly maze, or resolutely strikes
Where Hilda shouts most fiercely. Leonmær,
Quitting his fertile lands at Saraburne,
Oswin of Werham, witness to broken oaths
And violated faith, the faith of men
As faithless as their Gods ; holding that faith
Pledged to a race which bows not at their shrines,
Binds not or God or man. Of Portloca
Alfric, whose stern eye went in Western gales
To watch the fierce sea bait his native rock,

Gleams in the warrior tempest. Of Wimbourne
Ealdwulf and Eadin, Ealdhelm of Crenbourne,
And Werstan of Gillingahamme, strong nerved
To wrestle with the hart in his mad heat.
And Alfwold of Redinga, whose stout limbs
Bare him at full stretch from proud Assandune,
When his good brown sword eagerly fleshed herself
Upon the pagans fleeing. Nor less in fame
Oswold of Lambourne, Æthelswitha's dower ;
Æthelm of Ayschesbyrig, Eanred of Æscedune,
Or Alcmund of Wellingaford. Strong Oswald,
With brave Earl Ethelwulf, at Inglefield
Taught the foul foeman how a Saxon arm
Could battle for the right. With Sigwulf these,
Sigwulf of Aeclea, where affection strews
Roses over virgin graves, discoursing love
Even in death's cold ear : where laurel wreaths
Fade not from patriot brows, but to the future
Tell the proud honours of departed time ;
Ride proudly conscious of their noble trust.
Each with four horsemen, veteran men-at-arms,
True liegemen all, well mounted, well equipped ;
And, at their bidding, every attendant knight
Of every Royal, every inferior thegn
Holds himself ready. Around Lucumon
Part guard the Standard. Under the Ealdorman
Marshalled the others ride, with gonfalon,
And beaming spear-point, buckler, and bright mail.
Reflecting the evening sun, over Bannesdune
Pouring her glorious flood of living light,

Gleaming in every streamlet, tipping with fire
Each charred, each blackened trunk, red cressets fierce
The avengers to urge on.—Wide-spread and dimly,
The deepening shadows settle ; the gray gnat
Revels in her joyous flight, the beetle hums
Her drowsy twilight note ; their woods around
Shrivelled, and bare, and dreary, the dark rook
Wheels in her flight, complaining : croaking fearfully,
Heedless of dying ewes or sickly lambs,
Flapping his broad wings huge, the hungry raven
Cries to the hooded crow : the hooded crow
Streams from the Northern wild, and bids the erne
Scream to the Eastern vulture. Presagers
Of slaughter yet to come, their earthward eyes
The field of blood select 'ere reek of blood
Stains the nauseating sky.—In humble garb,
Garb loved by his Men of Summursete, the King
Louts along Abona's bank, in peasant wise
Stayed by a quarter-staff : to Ethelnoth
And his brave Earls alone his secret task
Confided, forbidden all companionship.—
Watching the languid ephemerons' dying flight,
Seeming to loiter, perseveringly
Threads he the willow shade. Abona's depth
Seems but another sky, and glimmering stars
Look upward to their sister stars in heaven,
As virgin spirits up to angels look,
Longing with them on fleecy clouds to float
And track swiftly shooting meteors. Deep the calmness
Sinks into his pensive bosom, and he sighs

That Nature's beautiful sanctity should be
By destructive treat defiled. "O, that my heart
Were open to the world as unto thee
My father, and my God ! O, that my foes,
Thy foes my country's enemies, would know
How intensely I this task of blood detest
Which ere necessity teaches. O, my father !
I lift to thee these supplicating hands,
These eyes to thee I raise : to thee I speak
My father, my preserver ! Gracious Lord !
Dread God of my forefathers ! for the sake
Of my beloved country, to my sword
Decisive victory grant ; that this one blow
The deadly strife may end ; that blood no more
My native land may stain ; but that glad peace
May fold us in her halcyon wings, and joy
Shall be our songs of praise, of praise to thee,
Our Maker, our Redeemer, Sanctifier,
Our great, our glorious God. Should it accord
With thy beneficent purposing, when this foe
Shall cringe beneath our feet, our weapons turn
Like fair Mercy's palms : grant us to soothe
The sufferings of the vanquished, to alleviate
The shame of degradation, and to teach
Forbearance by our forbearance ; by our love
The fangs of hatred to break, and shewing them
The mercy of Christian men, lead them to seek
For pardon unto thee, lead them to loathe
Their foul, their repulsive idols, and to bow
Submissively at thy feet : to sit, to learn

In beauteous penitence thy lovely truths,
To break their warlike weapons, to forsake
Their robbery, their slaughter, and to be
One people with my glad people ; one in thee,
As thou art in our Saviour, he in thee.”
Lightened in heart, and confident in Heaven,
Treads he the dangerous path, not ignorant
Of it's dangers, it's concealments, often trodden
By his predatory bands.—By the river bank
Reaching the Julian road, with agile step
Rapidly silent, from Verlucio's
Tottering towers dislodging the bitch-fox,
Scattering her vixen cubs, he observantly
Overlooks their ill-ordered camp by watch-fire light ;
Notes every circumstance of their revelry ;
The reeling, the staggering dance, the combat fierce,
The mutually inflicted slaughter : drinking, sleeping,
Shouting and singing, watchfulness forgotten,
And universal riot, rioting
In mad unlicensed indulgence. Salt the tears
Course down his manly cheek ; he sighs, he turns,
Bitterly regretting the unwarriorlike recklessness
Which to him gives advantage.—Through the deep,
Thick-tangled forest upon Wodensdyke
The path he traces back.—Ages long past
Have hidden it's origin, concealed it's use ;
It says, “ Man has been here,” nor other word
The trench, the steep bank utter. The green sward,
The clover, and the wild thyme joyously
Greet the traveller as he passes ; the first traveller

Has been, and is forgotten.—Human Pride,
 Where is thy glory! even Verlucio,
 Strength of the iron men whose national fame
 Yet lives in sad recollection, was, and is not.
 Her Doric columns broken, her proud fanes
 Heaps of rubbish rudely mis-shapen, and her walls
 Mounds of destruction, to be swept away,
 To be levelled by peasant hands.—Thus thinks the King
 And longs for better remembrance.—Be his memory
 Given as the vivid grass he treads upon,
 And fragrant as the flower that pours up
 Its sweetness beneath his feet!—The watch-word given,
 Keen Vigilance with suspicious scrutiny
 Searching knows not her King, to untaught eyes
 So perfect his concealment. To the Earls
 She leads, and with them leaves him, wondering.

Swollen with pride of heart, elatedly
 Assuming dominion, the demons
 Have scaled the length, the breadth of Anglia,
 Covered the isles grasped on Menavia,
 Demoralised, hated them
 And mapped them into king-rykes, and have fixed
 Each his own metropolis of fraudulent lies,
 Of pretence dominion; dreaming that,
 Furbering hill and plain, wide-spread and huge
 Will rise up their pillared temples girt with gold,
 Wherein frowning idols will lap up the blood,
 Will devour the souls of men:—and—to their eyes,
 The only pure, the only holy faith,
 Dishonoured, reviled, trampled upon, despised,

Spurned at, rejected, outcast and forgotten,
Cancerous idolatry will her proud head rear,
Insult the throne of God, and God, disheartened
The brutalized will leave, in their own devices
To embrate themselves more deeply. Triumphant,
Glorying, they see enthusiast votaries
Stone upon stone rearing up Godmundinghame,
Slaughtering Christian men, and violating
The vows of Christian women, setting at naught
The sacred rights of conscience, tolerating
No faith but their own faith, and butchering
Or hanging up to Odin, all, who loathing
Their blasphemous pollutions, seal with blood
Their love of the Holy God, the just, the pure,
Who abhors cruelty, abhors it most
When cloaked in religion's garb.—Suddenly
Their hopes are smitten.—With disordered brow
And visage incomposed, tongue-tremulous
With terror or excitement, Odin lifts
His voice, ominously roaring, roaring as flames
Devouring sucking children, when at Gehenna
As Moloch he sat exalted, and from his arms
Rolled them on to the fiery hearth. “Whatever names
Most powerful ye acknowledge, by that name
Ye Gods! I invoke ye all. Gods! I adjure ye
By all the sevenfold horrors of that Hell
Which yawns for us if we fail, Up, and be armed”!
They await no second word. So little wont
To hear such urgent appealing, up they start,
Each one as a moving mountain cased in ice,

The Abyss! the space beneath our feet? No—that Abyss
Which incites godlike natures, is the clear
Ouendlangeri, the boundless: that which spans
With it's bright rainbow-lustre, that high throne
From which our glorious Sultan distributing,
Shall give to every one the least of us
Ten Systems for a realm; realm yet too straitened
For the youngest, the weakest; but I delay your joy,
I tantalize you.—Alfred is up in arms,
And on to-morrow's issue hangs our fate.
Fate said I? fortune.—Your stern resolution
Has willed it,—We are triumphant"!—At the height
Of prosperity's ascent, a backward glance
Shews us every footpace mouldering. Or success,
Or—nothing—and in maddening persistence
We strive, we climb, we cling. The sickening pause
Intolerable,—we obstinately close our eyes
And swear we have succeeded.—So, drawing hard
The dread-interrupted breath, but for a moment
The infatuated demon host affect
Ecstasies of exuberant gladness, boastfully
Detail their brave exploits, their thousands slay
And anticipate ten thousands.—Threatening,
Each eye a baleful meteor wrapped in storms,
Odin pre-eminent stands as Snæfels-Jokul
Girded by volcanic mountains. Loud their shouts
Volley through upper air, vociferously
Calling in all wandering spirits. The Arch-wanderer,
The sole of whose foot never knows glad rest
But ever-wandering toils, in the far East

Deliberate, matured, and well-sustained,
Has doubtlessly been taken, and my reasons
Better have been urged by others ; yet I hold them
Deserving most considerate thought. Idle it were
To profess no knowledge of, to boast no care
For circumstances past. Idle it were
To say we bear no scars, we feel no pangs
Inflicted, still inflicting by the tyrant
Whose chains we broke, gloriously broke, yet never
Have thrown off the ancle-rings ; they, festering,
Gnaw into our very substance. War of force
Hitherto has been our bane, still will be bane ;
Not so the strife of fraud ; there has success
Smiled upon effort. This puny, this praying man,
This whimpering, would-be King, this slave of slaves
Has himself placed in our persecutor's hands,
And hard experience bitterly has taught us
How David fared, how That Messiah fared
In such reliance.—Certain that Raphaël
Will task his cunning, certain that Michâël
And his bedizened host will task our strength,
Our pursuing strength that would chase throughout all space,
(For your fierce looks assure me of such result,)
His host in ignominious rout dispersed ;
That arm which once we felt, would be laid bare,
And his ten thousand thunders volleying
Might work us much despite. I then had urged,
Yet doubtless it has been urged ; there is a course
To failure less exposed : and should not we
Husband our strength, in war instructed well,

By the venom of nature, and the heart is ripe,
Then be advanced our opportunity
By every art, the end enhallowing
The means to be employed. The priests, corrupt
By pomps, by worship, by the subserviency
Of their bewildered dupes ; teach them that imagery,
(Imagery which He abhors by which we triumph)
Is but symbolic ; that in worshipping
Through us (for we can ape most holy saints,
Rot in their filth, and be by odour known,)
Devoutly they worship him : that holding them
In honour, bowing, kneeling to, kissing them
Is not idolatry, but by him loved
For it's humility. Teach them to imitate
Our oracular responses, govern them
Through their own lusts, the lust of priestly power
Of priestly intolerance, gorge them with wealth
Surpassing that of kings, right splendidly
Be they caparisoned, thus gorgeousness,
Luxury, and unbridled licentiousness,
Spreading from priest to people, so shall disgust
Him they profess to adore, that he shall loath,
Turn from, abhor them. Nor need we long await
Restitution of our rights, the sacred rights,
Rights of our ancient faith, the stern old faith,
Their forefather's honest faith. Already have we,
For ye are in me, with me, act by me,
The advantage your own, servant of servants I,
Poisoned the fountain : man's perversity
Lust, pride, and vanity, but one taint need,

Quarry they pollute all else. Foul legends have
Made of dead men marvellous saints, dark miracles,
As easily swallowed as impatiently devised,
So have boasted men, that they dare not
Doubt believe but as they are told. I would have said,
Yet doubtless it has been said; Gethsemane may be
Equally fabled, may in expediency,
Stalking horse of politicians, make secure
A crown by exchange of faith, and his whole herd
Be as true men as their king, bell-wether he
To an unquestioning flock; with our trusted weapons
Hacking our entranced throats. Thus should we fail
Doubting will be our failure: if far ever,
Yet, not will be that far ever. But, fail us fraud,
Power still would be at command, we more extorted
Than if overpowered; in that, before
Revert to the last appeal, we mediated
By the mild arts of peace, subtlest persuasion
And mildest beguilement. Further had I said,
Untrue however it has been said: we know, by long
Experienced remark, when men persist
And will tread in our course, he gives them up
To their illusions, willing them to believe
The lies of their own forging. The oracles
Blind saved by these, do most expressly point,
And they are patient or to Gods or men,
To such a most hideous state of tyranny
Over both body and soul, that he himself
As in despite of himself, must, with fate armed
Break the enslaving chain. These had I urged

And more that doubtless has been ably urged ;
But—as ye have resolved—as ye are resolved
Not to re-deliberate ; behoves us all
Against the worst to prepare, our hearts to nerve
And never cry “ hold ” ; but torture overpower,
By torture out-braving ; so rejoicing over
The malice of our tormentor.” His rapid glance
Detects not one quailing eye : out-fiended by
Those he once hounded on ; impetuously
He swells to his whole height, a monster huge
As Earth’s broad breast can bear. Round his strong frame
A hundred demons wind his hacqueton,
Compacted by Artifice, of artifice
Inwoven with artifice, unpierceable,
As imperceptible ; each swollen vein,
Tough tendon, and ponderous muscle, cleanly defined
As the texture were flesh itself. All wondering, gaze,
Admire, commend, and envy ; maliciously
Muttering within their teeth, that he alone
So carefully should be enmeshed : with looks askance
Talk of suspicions deep, of cowardice,
And would say treachery, but that treason rather
Would danger enhance ; for he shall foremost stand
In the main-battle. Over his massive front,
His strongly compacted shoulders, and deep loins,
Breastplate and backplate spread. Broad cuishes grasp
His highly developed thighs, and, armed complete
He stands an eclipsed sun, a lurid moon
Hanging on his shielded arm. Two-handed, keen
As double-edged deceit, ponderous the sword

Sways from his shoulder blades. Heavy and high,
His spear point, as a cresset on a mountain top
Sheds terror: so overpoweringly vast
Stands he, who, cloud-rending Thor to him compared
Had been but a feeble dwarf. Over his helm,
No morning star in heaven's brightness bathed,
Went in far happier time his brow to emblaze;
A streaming comet glares, with black blood blurred,
Dabbled with spotted pestilence. Dim death
Stalks with him pace by pace. Apart he stands
No compeer mating him. So once stood he
Before his dazzling throne, admired, beloved,
And his blazing glory rejoiced in, 'ere that pride
Craving ambition, thirst for perpetual power
His speckless lustre bedimmed, for beauteous
It was as essential light. O, that sin ever
Had defiled such loveliness, and dragged it into
The unfathomable gulf! Close-thronging, dark,
Thick as autumnal leaves, as portents fierce
Troubling the middle air, and threatening change
Of dynasties or nations: cloud upon cloud
Hurry athwart the evening-sun, and glare
Defiance around their leader, demons, each
Of power to wield a continent. He speaks,
And breathless expectation hangs upon,
Treasures up every word: "I have accepted
And shrink not from the honour with the danger,
Princes! Most powerful warriors! Potentates!
And Thrones of that bright region, whence we fell,
But to ascend more gloriously, and surpass

All former pre-~~e~~minent splendour ; the high Throne
Of our scarcely inferior Heaven ; and of this host,
This worthy, this valorous host, unworthily
Where many worthier stand, this proud post hold ;
And gladly hold it. Once at Ambition's tempting
I led ye in her path :—we failed, where better
And mightier might have failed ; then inexperienced
In our adversary's daring, of his thunders,
His slumbering thunders ignorant.—Revenge,
Desire of re-possession, glorious desire
Your right to re-assert, your own to claim,
Has prompted this attempt. I follow now
The path ye have selected, your resolve
Take as my own resolve, haply to lead you
To happier result. If happier, yours
Be all the glory, the fame ; if adversely
The scales of contest sink, no uttered word
Shall ever escape my lip ; then, even will be
Our daring, even our fall. Against all chances
Armed, and against all suffering resolved,
Here—before ye brave warriors—thus I hurl
Our gage of battle, striking the first blow
Heavily and firmly. “ Up, from the wide horizon
Cloud, storm, and tempest ! Deluges pour down,
This vermin host sweep away ” !—From the dim verge,
To the Prince of the Powers of Air obedient,
Horsed upon warring winds career along
Frowning portentous clouds ; black water-spouts,
In darkness of thickest darkness o'er the Main,
Roll heavily on, with suffocating fogs

Heaping up height on height, concentrating
Strength within gloomy strength. Again it pours
Reverberating, re-thundering. So the fiends
Nine steps recoiling, onward their full weight urge
The Archangel to displace ; yet so he stands
As Moses on the Red-Sea brink, and cleaves
Through the astounded host a valley broad
With one indignant word. Hurl'd, heaps on heaps,
Masses in masses convolved, wide staggering,
Disentangling their limbs they stand, or stretched supine
Howl in enraged ferocity. "Forbear !
One step and ye are lost. I seek not yet
To bind ye in fiery fetters, unwrenchable
By ten thousand times your strength. Obey me!—Flee" !
With commanding voice and unmoved aspect speaks,
Save that severity his brow informs,
The Chief of Angels.—To him Sathanas
In bitter scorn replies. "And thinkest thou
Again, amid pursuing thunders, on our rear
To hail that grievous hail, to stretch us out
Upon the sulphurous lake, and chain us there ;
Fond minion of that minion who enthroned
In intolerable light, until then withheld,
Blinded us to stumble upon the sheer-down edge
Of the infinite abyss, dragging with us
Of the battlements of heaven? Fall we did
Where others would have fallen, rise we did
Whence others would not have arisen, and we here,
Holding our rightful dominion, mean to hold it
Of all resistance in spite. Avoid thee hence !

Or, thundering, my spear so shall transfix thee,
Ten thousand legions shall not wrench it from
The bowels of that rock, whence thou shall spread
Imploring arms in vain." High threatening,
Ponderous the mountain pine in his strong hand
Trembles with bickering rage. Calmly Michaël
Measures the enormous bulk, by his firm eye
Restraining the furious spear. "Satan! thou knowest
Thy date has not yet elapsed, and thus presumest
To dare where danger exists not, deeming indeed
God here will not suffer contest, lest his work
Should be wrecked in the furious struggle; knowing not
That thy might, yea all thy legionary might
Against Heaven's legion contesting, could not move
From the beach one minutest pebble, if He forbade,
In whom even thou existest; not indeed
For thy good but to exalt his goodness.
Thou knowest the righteous day will not arrive
Until that the Man of Sin disclosed shall be,
Son of perdition dark, who sinfully
Shall himself exalt even to the throne of God,
And in God's temple sitting proclaim himself
Even as the Holy God 'till seducing spirits,
Seducing condemned spirits, hypocrites
Shall forbid marriage the pure ordinance
Of the Lord God of Heaven: shall restrain
The use of meats, given by the God of Heaven
For sustenance, for thankfulness; shall change
Times, set aside his law who wrote the law;
And daringly, yea blasphemously assert

Himself as the Living God ; and persecute,
Slay, burn, destroy, and unto death torment
All whose most righteous knees refuse to bend
To the gods of his creation : impiously
Seeking to establish such revolting sin
By fabricated miracles. Thou knowest this.
Further thou knowest : thy date is not assigned
Until the Great Harlot of the Apocalypse,
Mother of all harlotry, Mystical Babylon
Shall sit upon peoples, nations, languages,
And, of her abominations, mixing wine,
With all the mighty Kings of earth shall mingle,
Shall urge war against the Holy Lord of Hosts,
The only Kings of Kings ; shall, foully drunken
With blood of prophets, of martyrs, of holy men,
Utterly be destroyed ; and the red smoke,
Out from that loathsome pit of living death
Where she her teeth will gnash, with the vile beast,
And the false, the impious prophet ; high ascend
For ever, yea, for ever. Knowest thou this.
Tempt not thy chastisement. Far hence, away
To thy lone, thy endless wandering." They obstinately
Still bent upon opposition ; from his thigh,
Forth of it's radiant sheath the Archangel
Draws the keen sword of Truth. At the irresistible
Flash, fall the trembling fiends ; all, save their chief,
He, dropping his disordered armour, flees
With such precipitation, as he erst
Fled from the linked thunderbolts, and yells
Till the empyrean rings.—At the keen flash

Whose torment and whose smoke, for ever, for ever,
Shall from the abyss heave up.—Each trembling heart
With similar fire burns, gnaws. Pale, terror stricken,
Anxious for swift escape, as toads or newts,
Hideous disgusting reptiles, or aught else,
Deep underneath the fragmentary fane
They slink into holes, chinks, crevices, nor stay
Even at Earth's molten centre. They avoid
By her extremest width, the terrible
Display of angelic power, and there still
Shiver.—With wondering eyes the pious host
Have gazed upon a splendid vision of heavy clouds
Rolling in awful heaps, and scintillating,
Glimpses of meteoric lances gleaming, glancing,
Darting athwart the welkin. A broad flash,
And armed warriors horsed, and marshalled bands
With banners wide outspread, have on the waves,
The pulsating waves of light appeared, have faded,
Appeared, and died again : And they have seen
The whole subside into darkness.—The clear sky
Gemmed with it's glorious host, thick-sown, and full
Of the Creator's beauty, wide outspread
In beneficent, in holy calmness, visibly
Watches over the good the true.—Softly sleep they
Upon their arms who sleep ; adoring watch
Those who the night out-watch, and Æcglea
Conscious of the noble trust her green-sward smooths.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



